

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

¹⁴Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”

¹⁵Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

¹⁶And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

¹⁸“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’

²⁰“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

²¹“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

[PRAY]

Last week I began with asking you to complete the following sentence:

“If I won the lottery, I would....”

Given that the probability of winning the Powerball, for instance – if you were to play only one set of numbers, would be **1 in 292,201,338**.

You can of course, improve your odds of winning by purchasing more tickets and playing more combinations, but realistically speaking, it won’t make much of a difference. <https://www.lotterycritic.com/lottery-odds/powerball-odds-math/>

Indulge me once again, if you would, and answer this question:

If you are evacuating your home because of fire, what would you grab on the way out the door? (Turn and tell the person next to you.)

The probability of a house fire is one in four, so unfortunately, it is significantly higher than winning the lottery!

This question intrigued photographer Foster Huntington, so he gathered his “must save” belongings and took a photo. Then he asked some friends to think about that question and photograph their “must-save” belongings. The burning house question sparked a lot of discussion.

In fact, in May of 2011, Huntington launched a website with photos of personal items that people would grab on the way out the door. Within a year, he received thousands of photos from around the world that captured people’s responses to this question.

Here are a few of the responses:

- *My husband, son and three cats
- * My daughter, everything else can be replaced
- *Earrings I wore on my wedding day
- *Ring my father gave me when I was twelve
- *Mystery Box (My father put something inside before I nailed it shut, forever closed until I am an old man and he is long gone)
- *My grandfather’s Bible
- *I Phone
- *wallet
- *purse
- *Very old teddy bear from my childhood
- *personal journal
- *My globe, to always remind me of all the places I dream of seeing
- *Flip flops, a bathing suit and a change of clothes, because if my house burns down, I’m going to the beach!

Huntington says that this project taught him a valuable lesson about material possessions. The question forces people to thinking about *what they want, versus what they really need*. For instance, his own photo originally included 18 must-have items. But after reflecting on this question for over one year, his list shrunk to only two absolutely, irreplaceable items.

Jesus tells this particular parable in response to a request from a man, who wants Jesus to arbitrate a dispute over an inheritance. Sadly, all of us have not doubt, observed families, torn apart over similar divisions—bickering over money or possessions. It can get ugly. But Jesus refuses to get roped into this drama.

Instead, Jesus issues a warning and then tells a story...

The warning is this: "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." (v.13)

"...all kinds of greed" is, in Greek, also translated "grasping ambition". Greed is more than a lack of contentment with what God provides. This type of greed might better be understood as avarice.

Chaucer defines "avarice" as "keeping and withholding such things as one has, when there is no need to do so." Avarice is the clenched fist sort of greed, the kind that holds on, and holds back.

One wonders: What feeds this desire?

Perhaps it is fear, fear of not having enough. If I eat the bread I have today, then what shall I do tomorrow? Where will my next meal come from? Perhaps this is why Jesus taught us to pray: "Give us today the bread we need."

Fear of scarcity or lacking enough for one's basic needs, may in fact be the motivation for hoarding or greed. It was not uncommon for those who lived through the depression to continue to save items such as used tin foil and so on, even after the need for doing so was over.

The propensity to hoard goods was considered a violation of the OT law. Why? Because it is idolatry. It violates the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me."

Jesus tells the story of a man who is, by all standards of measurement, considered highly successful. He is a farmer who experiences a year in which his fields yield a bumper crop! In fact, he has such an abundance, that the only alternative that occurs to him, is to build new, bigger barns to contain it all. Mind you, the prosperity he experiences results from the land and its productivity! It is not result of his own effort.

¹⁸"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

The parable concludes when God announces: “You fool. This very night, your life will be demanded of you.”

At the height of his prosperity, he dies.

Why is this man a fool?

He is not a fool because he acquired his wealth in a dishonest fashion, nor is he wicked or unjust. Nor is there anything to indicate that Jesus called this man a fool because he was rich. Jesus never made a universal indictment against all wealth.

So why did Jesus call this man a fool?

This man was a fool because everything in his life revolved around himself—notice all the first person, singular pronouns in this brief passage—I, me, my, mine—predominate. He has no thoughts beyond himself; he lacks concern for others. And, he is a fool because he lives his life without reference to God!

In addition, this person confuses what is material and what is spiritual, what is temporary and what is eternal. We too are foolish if and when we confuse the two and expect material things to satisfy our spiritual needs and longings.

In essence, Jesus is talking about what constitutes a life. *In Greek there are three words for “life”.* “One was **bios**, which referred to **quantitative life**, i.e., how long one lived, how many goods one acquired. Another was **psyche**, which referred to **qualitative life**, i.e., the values and relationships that constitute personhood. The third was **zoe**, which referred to **quintessential life**, i.e., to the life offered to us in the call of Christ, and through him, to live in a personal relationship with God the Father. Jesus uses this last word, **zoe**, to describe the life that this man chose to ignore! That is why he is a fool! (J. Edwards, “Life in Three Dimensions,” Touchstone (1993) p17-21)

I’d like to quote another preacher on this text who said:

“This man was a fool because he allowed the *means* by which he lived, to outdistance the *ends* for which he lived. He was a fool because he maximized the minimum, and minimized the maximum. This man was a fool because he allowed his technology, to outdistance his theology. This man was a fool because he allowed his mentality to outrun his morality. Somehow he became so involved in the *means* by which he lived, to the exclusion of the end or spiritual/eternal matters.” Martin Luther King, Jr.

Bottom line?

It's not about the money. It's not about the stuff. It's about a life lived in personal relationship with the living God. It's about our attitude toward money and possessions. It's about the temptation of being lured into believing the unfulfilled promise that those things appear to offer.

Admittedly, we easily get sucked into consumerism, don't we? (Pretty soon "Black Friday" will be the day after Halloween!) Take one look at a commercial site online, and ever after you will be constantly bombarded by pop up advertising from that same site! Now that the holidays are upon us, we are inundated with advertising messages—online, on radio, television, and print media--that exploit our insecurities and would sell us things that promise far more than they can possibly deliver.

Yesterday, NPR host Scott Simon interviewed Tom Hanks, who portrays Mr. Rogers in an upcoming movie. As to why Fred Rogers went into children's television programming, Hanks said this: "He went into children's television in 1955 because he saw that this magnificent machine (that was going to be) in everybody's living room was really meant to turn the children that were watching it, into consumers. Meaning that if you don't eat this breakfast cereal, if you don't have this toy (that you can ask your parents for), if you're not wearing these clothes, (then) you don't have the same amount of worth. ... He viewed that, I think, as a great sin against the audience."

<https://www.npr.org/2019/11/23/781166797/tom-hanks-plays-mister-rogers-sharing-joy-is-the-natural-state-of-things>

Wow—Mr. Rogers' insight relative to children, applies to the effect of television (and media in general) upon all of us regardless of age!

Advertising is designed to exploit our inborn sense of insecurity. This kind of "inadequacy marketing" first identifies and exaggerates something we are insecure about—our breath, our body, our status—etc. Then it attempts to sell us a solution—mouthwash, a weight loss program, a bigger better car, etc.—that promises to remedy our situation and make us "acceptable" again.

Furthermore, materialism...consumerism...or "affluenza"—or whatever else you might want to call it—has one advantage over the abundant life Jesus offers: it is immediately tangible.

Relationships, community, life-giving faith—the kinds of things that Jesus invites us to embrace and strive for—are much harder to achieve. We know a good relationship when we experience it, but it is impossible to produce one in a moment's notice. Relationships require an investment of time and energy; they are costly in a different way.

It is much faster and easier to go to store and purchase deodorant or mouth wash, than it is to develop a trusting, mutual relationship.

Like the man in the parable, we may substitute material goods for immaterial ones because, for one, we have a culture that tells us this is how to live a fulfilling life. Purchase this item, drive this car, wear this brand—and we will be fulfilled, secure, and never lack for friends and influence.

St. Augustine once said that God gave us people to love, things to use, and sin is confusing the two. Our problem is NOT money, nor it is in our possessions. Our problem is in our willingness to buy into the belief that this is what constitutes a life—and that possessions can satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts.

The question we began with this morning illustrates for us what we truly value. The abundant life that Jesus offers does not consist in the things we have, as much as in who we are, and whose we are, and the values and the relationships that inform our choices.

Instead of living out of fear and insecurity, may we grow deeper in our trust in God and in God's provision that is promised us.

Particularly this week, as we celebrate Thanksgiving, may we, as recipients of God's immense generosity, (may we) unclench our hands and share God's gifts with others.

By God's grace, may we know when "enough is enough"! Then we shall be truly rich indeed!

(Pray)