



St. Luke's East Hampton

Sermon preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

August 3, 2025; Proper 13C: Hosea 11:1-11; Colossians 3:1-11; [Luke 12:13-21](#)

The last time I preached on these lessons I had just returned from a month at a small church on the Big Island of Hawaii, covering while their priest was on vacation. It was a sweet deal. For doing Sunday services and working two half days a week, I was given airfare for me and my wife, a place to stay, and a car. We were there long enough to get to know local people and dive into the local community. Like Maine, there is a lot of affluence near the coast. Like Maine, you don't have to go very far inland to generational poverty, struggles with opioid addiction, prejudice and other issues. The longer we were there, the more people started opening up and sharing their struggles. Despite all this, however, everyone we met was filled with a sense of "Ohana" (a connectedness to family and to place) and the "Aloha Spirit" (which, much more than the wearing tropical shirts, is a way of looking at the world filled with joy and a spirituality based on connecting to its source). The friend who invited us to come there was a descendant both of Kamehameha (making her Hawaiian royalty) and of a western businessman who had once owned a ranch that covered hundreds of acres. She told the story of how during the depression before and after World War II, the family had sold the land – just before tourism and development took off. She took us to the huge resort and high-end mall that now sits where her grandfather's farm was and laughed about the bad business decisions that had been made. She wasn't bitter or filled with what ifs. Like the others we met, she was filled with Ohana and the Aloha Spirit. For her and for them, the bottom line wasn't the bottom line.

Last week, Hosea and Paul warned about the consequences of following other gods. Today Jesus speaks about the idolatry of money. Of course we need to plan for our financial futures, save for our retirements, and all of that. How does our use of money reflect our faith, our values, and our personal goals? Consider the issue of tax cuts. People put a lot of hope these days in tax cuts. Would they have the same level of enthusiasm if they knew that their tax cut meant that millions of people in the United States will be at risk of premature death because of lack of health care, lack of food assistance, or lack of data needed to accurately prepare for and respond to natural disasters? Would they have the same level of enthusiasm if they knew that their tax cuts meant that millions of people around the world would die from AIDS, from starvation, from the impact of unmitigated climate change, or from diseases whose cures were not found because funding for research was taken away? Budgets are moral documents. What we do with our money - and allow others to do with our money – is a measure of our spirituality and faith. On a personal level, people tend to place their assets in portfolios that offer the highest returns.

Do we ever check to see if the companies we support share our values in things like caring for the environment, striving for equity and equality, affirming the role of women, working not for war but for peace, and otherwise making the world a better place? If we – people of faith with considerable privilege and power who have a voice at the table - don't ask these questions or make these connections, how can we expect anyone else to do the same?

In today's gospel Jesus tells the story of a rich man who planned for the future by putting all his assets in great storehouses, only to die that night and never be able to use them. You can't take it with you. If the bottom line is the bottom line, we have missed the point – and missed an amazing missional opportunity. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul puts it this way: "If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above." He is asking them to be an example of the Kingdom of God, a place where "there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!" To put this in modern terms, a child in Gaza has the same value to God as a child in Israel, or a child on our southern border, or a child right here. The same is true for that child's parents, grandparents, and friends. Christ is in all of them. All are part of God's Ohana. All are filled with God's spirit. All deserved to be loved and treated with dignity. All deserve to be fed. As the body - the hands and feet of Christ - our mission is to do everything in our power to help those things come about. To quote the second chapter of the Letter of James, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."

The Parable of the Rich Man and the Storehouses is in Luke chapter 12. In Luke chapter 16, Jesus continues this theme with another Rich Man parable: the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. In this story a rich man faced judgement because he walked by a poor man named Lazarus every day and didn't do anything to help. Lazaruses, my friends, are all around us - on the front page of our papers and in homes just a few miles away from shore. Jesus gives us these parables to open our eyes... and to give us an opportunity to turn things around.

Last week, Hosea spoke about God's anger toward a people and nation who were following other gods. In this week's reading, God lets go of his anger and offers words of hope. Yes, we have gotten off track but it is still possible to come home. God still loves us, has compassion for us, and has not given up on us. God is giving us a reprieve, a chance to put our faith in action and our priorities back in order, reminding us that in God's eyes the bottom line isn't the bottom line. Ohana - connection to family and place. The Aloha Spirit – connection to source of love and joy. Perhaps my friends from Hawaii can show us how to begin to turn things around.