

The Eyes of All Look to You

Luke 12:22-34

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

August 7, 2016 – Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost

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In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Greed is a sneaky devil that creeps around and pounces on you before you even realize what's happening. Greed is like a tick that latches onto you while you're walking around in the yard. It hitches a ride in hopes of finding a nice, juicy place to sink its teeth into. Greed is so tricky and subtle that even we Christians build our lives upon it without so much as a second thought. The most obvious form of greed is that discontented, never-ending quest to gain more and more wealth or property. For example, I've often sat in my backyard and wondered how I might be able to acquire the piece of land just south of our house so we can keep the privacy we now enjoy for many years to come. And how nice would it be to get my hands on the property to the west as well? And if it were possible to do all that, what would I want next? You can call me crazy, but I don't think I'm alone in experiencing this form of greed.

But even if you manage to beat back the desire to acquire – if you can live contentedly with what you have – there's a second form of greed that will soon hunt you down and try to take you captive. This more cunning form of greed doesn't consist in what you desire, but has more to do with what you refuse to give up. This kind of greed soon will have you thinking: "I've already given thus-and-such, and that's quite enough. Now it's time for everyone else to do their part!" This manifestation of greed will tolerate the kind of giving which comes only out of one's surplus, but will refuse to tighten its belt or lower its standard of living to the point of sacrifice so that others might be served all the more. Sadly, this form of greed often causes you to think rather piously about yourself, convincing you that you do plenty enough already.

And that's not the worst of it. The worst of it is that none of us know how to repent of this kind of greed – this greed that's "at work in the members of our bodies, making us prisoners of the

Law of sin." We have no desire to turn away from this kind of greed, nor do we want it to stop. We simply cannot and will not sell what we possess and give to the poor" as Jesus instructs us to do in St. Matthew's Gospel. We don't trust our Lord enough to do that. We don't love Him enough to do that. Whether you like it or not, the truth is that there are some well-defined limits restricting what we're willing to abandon or give up. These limits define our greed. And there's hardly anything God hates more than greed – hardly anything more destructive to you and those you love than greed. Greed, given the opportunity, will turn your life into an endless, unwinnable rat-race. It will destroy family relationships. Left unchecked, it will eventually leave you alone in the world. It will convince you that nothing truly matters except what you want. This is why St. Paul states so bluntly in his letter to the Corinthians that "the greedy will not inherit the kingdom and reign of God" – and also why he calls such greed "idolatry."

Yet for all of God's deep hatred and loathing for the death grip we all keep on our greed, see the gentle way our Lord Jesus comes to us in today's Gospel. He rebukes and corrects us, but listen to how He does it. He says that if God so clothes the grass, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? This rebuke is really quite mild compared to the thunder and lightning which are certainly within our Lord's power to use against us. Jesus knows that if He were to come at you with terrors and threats, you would fly away like a bird escaping a cat. Hence, Jesus doesn't terrorize or threaten you in this Gospel, but rather draws you in with gentle words – just as a cow or horse might be enticed to come closer with a handful of clover.

"Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and

tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!"

With these words, our Lord Christ doesn't expressly forbid or condemn your greed – as sinful and as idolatrous as it might be. Instead, He simply makes your greed useless. He reminds you that as dear children of God you have no more need for greed than Eskimos have need of ice cubes. Our dear Savior points your eyes heavenward to the air, and downward to the field. With gentle, pointed words He promises you that our heavenly Father, who so meticulously cares for birds and flowers, will, with equal attentiveness, also continually care for you.

Many years ago I remember *Time* magazine running an article entitled: "Why the world can't afford food – and why higher prices are here to stay." This article spoke of nothing we don't know already by looking into our wallets and purses. Back then the cost of bread had increased 74%. Frozen vegetables were up an average of 28%. The cost of fresh fruit had risen 41%. The price of meat had increased anywhere from 64% to 124% – depending, of course, on the kind of meat you wanted to buy. Let's not even talk about gasoline – which most of us rely upon almost as much as water. And of course, we know that things have not improved in the years since that article was written. Next, add to all this the fact that the wages most people are paid haven't increased anywhere near as much as all these other things have increased – if at all. And the result of these increases – without a corresponding increase in the daily wage – is that most of you now have less buying power today than you had only a couple of years ago.

Still and all, we who are Christians should not regard such things as loss, but instead, as great personal gain. What do I mean by that? Have I lost my mind? I don't think so. I would like to suggest that you might want to think of our nation's financial crisis and your own individual place in the grand scheme of things as a gift and treasure which our loving, heavenly Father pur-

posefully and mercifully has given to us, His dear children. Just think about it. Those things you and I find ourselves unwilling to give up, our heavenly Father *lovingly* takes from us. Those things we find ourselves loving far too much, our dear Lord prevents us from loving any longer. When we find ourselves trusting in our own homemade crutches, God the Holy Spirit breaks them in order that we might learn to lean exclusively upon Him who both created and redeemed us – and desires for us nothing but every good. In this way, love and trust in God are created *for us*, rather than demanded *from us*.

Just look at the birds of the air, Jesus reminds us. Our heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Consider the lilies of the field. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Jesus, whose death and resurrection have provided for your greatest needs of body and soul, wants to assure you today that you are worth more than many sparrows. And what this also means is that you are worth more than your mortgage, your car loan, your medical bills, the cost of your groceries, your cell phone, or your retirement savings. By the power of His death, Jesus has forgiven you all you sin. By the power of His resurrection Jesus has guaranteed you the eternal redemption of your body. In Holy Baptism He claimed you to be His own. In Holy Absolution He continues to declare His forgiveness to You. And in His Holy Supper He continues to feed and nourish you – body and soul – until that day when you enter into the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end. Therefore, dear children of God, you can happily let all the rest go – for "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, with Him, graciously give us all things?" Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.