

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
June 28, 2015**

**Luke 12:13-21**

**Eight Deadly Sins: GREED**

- 1. The rich fool's demise**
- 2. Our greed**
- 3. Christ's righteousness**
- 4. God's guidance for the forgiven**

**Hymns: 184 – 469 – Closing: Glorify Thy Name**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

*Luke 12:13-21 –*

*Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."*

*Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"*

*Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

*And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'"*

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

*"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?'"*

*"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."*

**Henrietta Edwardina Schaefer Garrett.**

You might not be familiar with that name. On November 16, 1930, Henrietta Edwardina Schaefer Garrett died. She was 81 years old. She had been a widow for 35 years, and had inherited her husband's fortune when he had died. She had no children. She had outlived her siblings, aunts, uncles, and most of her few friends. For the last 15 years of her life she holed herself up in her mid-Victorian house with no electricity, telephone, or automobile. She died with no known heirs and with no known will. At the time of her death, she left behind an estate worth \$17,000,000 (about \$236,000,000 in today's money).

Can you guess what happened after she died? People began to make claims to her fortune, and thus began a bizarre 20-year legal saga that started in Philadelphia's Orphans' Court. Although she had few known relatives (cousins in Germany) and fewer than a dozen friends, attempts to prove a relationship to her and claim either part or all of her estate were made by more than 26,000 people from 47 states and 29 foreign countries, represented by more than 600 Philadelphia lawyers. Written testimony for the case filled 100,000 pages, bound in 323 volumes.

Alleged relatives committed perjury, faked family records, changed their names, altered information in church bibles, and made up stories about illegitimate children. As a result of all of this, twelve people were fined, ten people went to jail, two people committed suicide, and three were murdered. For good measure, a tale that Henrietta's maid had hidden her will in the coffin was circulated, causing the body to be exhumed seven years after burial!

Are you surprised? I'll let you do the research yourself to see the crazy end to that story, but I would imagine that you are not much surprised. Greed is such a common temptation. As we continue our summer sermon series called "Eight Deadly Sins," this morning we focus on the sin of greed. We will do that by reading a parable that Jesus taught in Luke 12, and then by looking at our own hearts

and lives, praying that God would give us the strength to avoid the sin of greed! (Read Luke 12:13-21)

## 1. The rich fool's demise

In this account, we see Jesus asked a question by a man in a huge crowd that was listening to him preach. Jesus paused in his teaching, and a man said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jewish inheritance laws required that for families with more than one son, the inheritance would be divided among all of them, with the oldest son getting double what the rest of the sons received. Maybe this was a younger son who wanted to get the same as his older brother? Maybe this was a son that had been wronged by his older brother? We don't know the details. We only know that he wanted a judge to "show him the month!" and thought that Jesus, the authoritative teacher, could be that person.

Jesus was not amused by his request. He had just been preaching about not being afraid to speak up about your faith. He had just told the people:

- That they should not fear those who can only kill the body
- That God cared for them more than the sparrows
- That the Holy Spirit would give them the words to say when they witnessed

And now, this man pipes up that Jesus should help him with his inheritance situation! Had he been listening to the topic of the day at all?

Jesus seems a bit perturbed, and called him "man," not a flattering term to address him with in his day. Then he took the opportunity to address the crowd on the topic of greed. He told a story about a wealthy farmer who had just been blessed with more wealth in the form of a bumper crop in his field. As we recount this story today, we have to be careful to remember what the point of Jesus' parable was and what the point was NOT.

His point was not:

- That it was a sin to be ambitious
- That it was a sin to work hard to get ahead

- That it was a sin to be rich
- That it was a sin to spend money on himself and his business
- That it was a sin to expand the business
- That it was a sin to plan ahead
- That it was a sin to retire

No, there is nothing wrong in and of those things!

What was his sin? Let me reread his words, and perhaps you can pick it out: *"He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"*

Did you catch it? The focus was pretty directly on himself in this situation. Where was his acknowledgment that God was the good Giver of this bumper crop? Where was the "Thank you" that should have been coming from his lips? Where was God in the planning process for what he would do with his wealth? Where was the first-fruit offering to the Lord? Where was the trust in God to provide for the future? None of that is here. This man needed to hear the words of James 4: *"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'"*

In this man's greed, he left the Lord out in his acknowledgement and his planning. His self-centered plans included only hoarding his wealth for himself.

We see what this man was about in one of the Greek words from the original account. The English says, *"I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy: eat, drink and be merry...'"* Literally, the Greek reads, *"I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many things laid up for many years..."* This

is what satisfied his SOUL. This is what he was about.

Tragically, the fool met a fool's end in Jesus' story. The Lord came to him that night and said (literally), "Tonight your soul will be asked of you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" Jesus' opening words to the parable had been apt: *"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

## 2. Our greed

Is the sin of greed one that lurks and waits for you? Or do you have a very good handle on it?

When I preached at Calvary, Bellevue earlier this month, I preached the first sermon in this series, the one that dealt with the sin of ANGER. A lady talked to me after church. She thanked me for my message and mentioned that it had been a timely one for her because of some things happening in her life that very week. I told her that I appreciated that, and that I would be putting together the next sermon I was preaching in the series, which would deal with GREED. She told me that it wouldn't be a loss for her to miss that one. She said it "wasn't her sin." She said that she didn't have a hang-up with money or greed.

I accepted what she said and I do pray that she has analyzed herself accurately, but I really did wonder! With the daily necessity of using money and material things for our bodily welfare, this can be a common trap. With the monthly need to track our income and outflow, to pay our bills, and to count our shekels, this can be such a common trap. With the attitudes and lessons that we learn from the world around us, this can be such a common trap. And it can also be such a subtle trap.

How do we see signs of the sin of greed? It has nothing to do with the amount of wealth that you have been blessed with. It does not matter if you are considered rich, or if you are living below the poverty line. It also does not necessarily have to do with the amounts that a person spends. It has to do with the attitude a person carries in their heart and the balance

that they have in how they use the blessings God has given them.

The diagnosis of greed is best done by God and by you yourself, as you are the one who can see into your heart. How will we see greed coming out?

- When your goals in life are primarily about the accumulation of the material and the physical
- When your prevailing attitude toward what you currently have can be characterized by the word "discontent"
- When your main thought about material things is that you need "more"
- When your main thought about the future is one of worry
- When the opportunity for using credit has been stretched too far
- When planning for the future doesn't include God in your thoughts or prayers
- When most of your social conversations inevitably include your assessment of your family's financial position
- When you can't bring yourself to lend to your brother in need
- When you do not give to charities that help those in need
- When your own true colors come out when there is an estate settlement in your extended family
- When a person says, "I can't worship at God's house because I have to work every Sunday (and Monday evening)."
- When a person is not giving God first-fruits in their offerings
- When a person is not giving to the Lord a proportional amount of his blessings to them
- When a person is not generous in their giving to the Lord
- When a person gets sensitive at hearing a sermon about the use of their money and possessions.

"Not my sin?" How common the sin of greed can be! How much we need to hear the words from Proverbs 23: *"Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show*

*restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle."*

The ultimate danger for people are the warning words of Christ who said, *"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matthew 16:26)

Even a congregation can have a culture of greed. This can happen when:

- The main philosophy for their annual budget and ministry is "maintenance ministry."
- When a congregation forgets that operating a school is indeed expensive and requires the support of all the members.
- When a congregation forgets that many outreach ventures a church does require money.

### **Christ's righteousness**

We desperately need help. We need to look to another. We need to look at our Savior, Jesus Christ, who served us perfectly in every way when it comes to forgiveness and contentment.

We need to be comforted by the fact that in his perfect life for you and for me, he never succumbed to the temptations of greed. In fact, the giving and sacrificial spirit that our Savior had was so great that if anyone wanted to accuse him of greed today, it would be laughable.

- When he was tempted by Satan at the beginning of his earthly ministry, the devil showed him the kingdoms of the world and said, "All this you can have if you bow down and worship me." Jesus replied, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"
- While his ill-fated disciple Judas dipped his hand into the disciples' money bag, we hear no mention of Jesus wanting to do the same.
- When we hear in Scripture that he, the Son of God, had all the glory and majesty, he came to earth where "oxes have holes and birds of the air have

ests, but the Son of Man would have no place to lay his head.

All of this would be to serve you and me. Paul would later write in 2 Corinthians 8, *"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."* Jesus would live a perfect life untainted by greed for earthly treasures in our place as our Savior. And he would lay everything down, even his own life on the cross, to pay for the sins of the world. Through his death and resurrection you have been freed from the guilt of your sins of greed!

### **3. Guidance for the forgiven**

So what now? How can we avoid falling into the sins of greed again? After all, it will be a lifelong temptation that we will endure.

Our reading sums it up in the verse at the end of our reading. As Jesus gave his final warning, he said, *"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."*

"Rich toward God." What does that mean? It doesn't merely refer to church offerings that a person gives. Being "rich toward God" is a much wider scope than that. It's a faith attitude of life. It's having a proper perspective of life, things, and eternity.

- It means always remembering that God owns it all.
- It means remembering that God has blessed you with what you currently have.
- It means that thanking the Lord will be a regular topic in our prayers.
- It means that we can work hard with ambition and industriousness, yet will be content with God's blessings.
- It means that we will have a godly balance in how we use God's blessings to us.
- It means that we will support God's work through our congregation so that more people can learn about their Savior and our own faith can be nurtured.

- It means that our perspective of money and things will be that they are just necessities to preserve our lives.
- It means that all of our planning will be done in the spirit of the phrase “God willing.”

Finally, perhaps you also said to yourself coming into this sermon message that greed “isn’t your sin.” If you are such a unique person that this trap doesn’t lie in your path, praise God. But if you are in the majority of people, who regularly undergo temptation to love the money and things of this world and use them unwisely, may God help you!

May he show you your Savior Christ who lived and died to forgive you of your sins. And may he give all of us a spirit of contentment and a desire to use his blessings wisely! Amen.