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“WHAT AM I ALLOWING TO CONTROL ME?”

Who would like to hear a good stewardship sermon?

- Who wants to be reminded, encouraged, or even guilted into giving more to the church?

This gospel reading is one that is often used as a stewardship text.

But I don't believe that this passage is about money or giving.

- It's not about wealth or possessions or material abundance.
- This text is about greed!
  - It's about the insatiable desire to have more.
  - And JESUS' lesson here is a challenge to us: to look at the things that seem most important to us,
    - and then to ask, “What am I allowing to control me?”

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JESUS tells a parable to illustrate this question, the “Parable of the Wealthy Fool.”

- The problem for the rich man in the story isn't that he had a great harvest, or that he is rich, or that he wants to plan for the future.
- The problem is that he has gone beyond being prepared for the future to being obsessed with having more.
  - Filling his adequate barns is not enough.
  - He must have bigger barns and more saved—enough for years and years.
- He has fallen prey to the idea that the good life consists of having more and more, and that idea is controlling him.

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And it doesn't just have to be wealth.

- A couple of weeks ago we heard how Martha was controlled by what people might think if she didn't serve them.
  - We can be controlled by the opinion of others.
  - Or by the lure of prestige and success.
    - It really is whatever we think will lead to the good life.
      - And the example today happens to be wealth.

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What does the good life consist of?

- If you read what JESUS says throughout the gospels, it becomes clear:
  - it is relationships that matter, with GOD and with others.
- The Good Samaritan broadens our understanding of who we imagine is our neighbor.
- The Prodigal Son clarifies the importance of family over wealth.
- Regularly, JESUS gives sermons about caring for the poor, loving our enemies, and doing good for those in need.

Not once does JESUS talk about high-paying jobs or building up our retirement accounts as the way into the Kingdom of GOD.

- In fact, the retirement account of which JESUS does speak is in fact, a place in the Kingdom of GOD that comes, not through wealth, or power, or success, but through faith.
  - *“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 whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward GOD.”*

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That doesn't mean that wealth or planning for the future are bad in and of themselves.

- Really, money can be used to accomplish wonderful things.
  - It can provide for you and your family.
  - It can be given to others in need.
  - It can create jobs and promote the general welfare.
  - It can make possible a more comfortable life.
- But it can't produce the kind of full and abundant life that each of us really desires and that JESUS provides.
  - So, JESUS isn't really talking about money in this parable;
  - He's talking about our attitude towards money and how we can easily let it control us rather than the other way around.

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I trust that all of us know and believe what JESUS is saying.

- Why, then, are so many seduced into the same mindset as the farmer in the parable?
- Well, all you have to do is watch TV for awhile and you'll be exposed to the same message that the farmer has bought into.

Advertising in all forms of media is designed to exploit our innermost insecurities.

- First, it identifies and exaggerates something of ourselves about which we are doubtful:
  - our status, comfort, body-image, even our breath, etc.
- Second, it offers us something that will remedy this concern and make us acceptable:
  - a bigger car, softer sheets, a weight-loss program or wrinkle cream, or mouthwash and a brighter smile.
- One further reason that these ads pull us in is that they offer us immediate and seemingly reachable results.

Then contrast these with the relationships, and purpose, and life-fulfillment to which JESUS invites us that are less tangible and harder to lay our hands on.

- We know what a good relationship feels like, but we just can't produce it on a moment's notice.
- We know how wonderful it feels to be accepted into a community, but it's not like you can run out to the store and buy it.
  - So, we substitute material goods for the immaterial ones because they're right there in front of us,
    - and our culture is telling us it's the best we can do.

What are you allowing to control you?

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How, then, do we move closer to the lifestyle JESUS want for us?

- Two suggestions:
  - 1) Recognize the system.
- Recognize how are culture tries to draw us toward materialism and away from the Kingdom of GOD.

St. Augustine once said that God gave us people to love and things to use, and that sin is confusing these two things.

- When we start loving things, we are in danger of using people.

Wealth is not the problem;

- our culturally-defined beliefs about what constitutes a good life is.

## 2) Practice naming blessings.

- Things like relationships, community, love, and purpose may be less measurable, but are far more powerful and meaningful than material goods.
- Yet each of us experiences them every day.
- So, at the end of the day, take time to thank GOD for those blessings that really matter and are of lasting value:
  - the joy of a good conversation;
  - the sense of purpose that comes from helping another;
  - the warmth of a loving relationship;
  - the feeling of community from gathering with family and friends;
  - the delight of good humor and good times with those who matter.
  
- Notice them; name them; and give thanks for them.
  - Do it with silent prayers of gratitude.
  - Write a brief email or note to thank someone.
  - Take time each evening to tell someone else.
  - Keep a log of blessings and look back to see how your perspective has changed and grown.

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## Money is not the problem.

- The love of things is.
- JESUS invites us to live a different set of values.
  - And if you wonder where you are in your life, take a look at the things that matter most to you,
    - the things toward which you are most often working,
    - the things that you believe will give your life meaning and value,
      - and then ask yourself, “What am I allowing to control me?”