



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092  
(262)241-3121 [www.stjohnsmequon.org](http://www.stjohnsmequon.org)  
Email: [office@stjohnsmequon.org](mailto:office@stjohnsmequon.org)  
**Pastor James Tiefel**  
**(262) 853-9723 (cell#)**  
Email: [pastortiefel@gmail.com](mailto:pastortiefel@gmail.com)

---

## Second Sunday after Pentecost

June 19, 2022

### Use Wealth Wisely

Jesus' words this week provide wisdom regarding the proper place earthly wealth ought to occupy in our lives. Jesus' followers don't disdain and despise wealth; they are grateful for every gift that comes from God. Believers understand, however, what wealth can and cannot do. They don't use wealth for a purpose it was never intended or give wealth a role in their lives it will never be able to fill. Believers pray that they might be "rich toward God."

### Sermon

**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; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 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 my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain 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 whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

What is your identity? That's a deep question to start, I know. But it doesn't have to be: what's the first thing that pops into your mind, what's your identity? The first thing I thought was "married seminarian". Those two words sum up just about everything I do. I study for the public ministry, and there are two kinds of people who do that: married ones and unmarried ones. As proof of God's grace, I'm one of the married ones. I'm sure a word or two or three sprung to the top when you thought about your identity: your career, Wisconsinite, father.

How do other people see your identity? Do they see you as good at your job? As a respectable citizen? As a caring parent? We care about how we present our identity before others. But even more important than how other people see us is...

What does God think your identity is? Our almighty God, by whose will we live or die, how does he identify us. Does God see you as a responsible worker, an upright citizen, a loving parent? In today's gospel, we stand by and watch God the Son identify someone as a fool. Harsh, frightening even, and yet we can find beautiful comfort behind his words.

As we study the reading, we'll first find out how Jesus responds to a specific real person, and find out **what kind of person does Jesus call a fool?** Then, we'll look at the parable Jesus addresses to everyone, including us, and answer the question: **Does Jesus call us fools?**

### **Part 1: What kind of person does Jesus call a fool?**

You'd think it was a scene from a rock concert. There was "a crowd of many thousands," Luke points out in his Gospel. In fact, the atmosphere was so frantic that Luke tells us they were "trampling on each other." But these people weren't trying to push to the front row of Bon Jovi. They were trying to listen to a rabbi from Nazareth.

Jesus was projecting his voice out to this huge crowd, teaching them, when a man managed to push his way through the mayhem to get close enough to speak to Jesus. And what was so important? **"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."** Now, it was common in Jesus's time for people to go to their religious leaders with legal problems—after all, the rabbis were supposed to be the masters of applying the Israelite law—so we'd think this man had his head screwed on straight. He had a life-changing legal problem, dividing an inheritance, so he went to the most popular rabbi at the time to get leverage.

But he didn't get the answer he expected. **"Jesus replied, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?'"** This man greatly underestimated Jesus's purpose on earth: he saw the Son of God as simply a judge. He didn't care as much about Jesus' teachings as he did about getting more money. Jesus used this man's mistake as an opportunity to project his voice again to the whole crowd to teach them about greed. **"Then Jesus said to the crowd, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.'"**

**"Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."** Sound familiar? The words echo King Solomon's words, who wrote what we read in the First Reading today. God had given Solomon extraordinary wisdom and extraordinary riches, and yet he still ended up acting foolishly: wasting his money on ungodly things. Eventually, he realized his stockpiles of wealth were meaningless, as we heard him say in the First Reading. It took Solomon, even with extra wisdom, a lifetime to discover the truth in Jesus's words: being as rich as possible is not the meaning of life.

Back to the man from the crowd. This man asks his question about the inheritance, and we might think, What's the big problem with this man wanting to get what his brother owed him? If we go to Walmart, buy a TV, take it home, and the screen is shattered, what do we do? We go right back to Walmart and expect them to give us our money back, and rightfully so. If we find out that our coworker is making more money than us, even though we do the same job, we're a little miffed. We can sympathize with this man who just wanted to get what his brother owed him!

But Jesus saw the man's heart. He saw the man's motivations. He saw that the man was so greedy, so wrapped up in getting his portion of the inheritance that he pushed his way through that crazy crowd to recruit Jesus as his lawyer. Jesus saw his foolish greed; his foolish greed that distracted him from all Jesus's other teachings. This is who Jesus identifies as a fool: someone who cares about money too much.

When we focus on getting something, even something rightfully owed us, we can get distracted from Jesus too. Don't get me wrong: I'm not saying that if your brand-new TV from Walmart doesn't work, you should hang it on the wall anyways and be content. Return the TV. What I am saying is what Jesus said, **"Be on your guard against all kinds of greed."** Watch out, be careful: greed is sneaky. Understand where the real danger is. The devil's goal isn't to get you to be greedy just so that you're greedy. His goal is to get you to be greedy so that you gradually begin to focus on that coworker making more than you, who doesn't even do as good a job and hasn't worked there as long and...before you know it, do you see what happened? Your thoughts are so occupied elsewhere that you lose focus on your Savior. Jesus had harsh words in the parable for those who misplace their priorities.

Greed is sneaky and so easy to slip in to. How can we avoid the constant death-pull of greed? Our Savior is the only way. We don't have to give in to our sinful greed anymore because Jesus defeated greed itself on the cross. God gives us the Holy Spirit so that we can strive to spot greed while it's still sneaking up on us and reject it. What does that look like:

how do we reject greed? We remember what Jesus did for us. If there was ever an opposite of greedy, it was Jesus. He set aside the riches of the entire universe because he loved us sinful, greedy people. He was willing to suffer incredible pain so that we wouldn't get what we deserved.

This is that beautiful comfort: by doing all that Jesus has given us a life with so much more meaning than an abundance of possessions. Instead of acting like this man whom Jesus called a fool: distracted by scrapping and clawing for every dollar we possibly can, we remember just how much Christ gave up for us. Instead of being possessed by selfishness we mimic Jesus' selflessness.

Jesus continued to teach the crowd about avoiding greed with a parable. Listen to the parable again, and especially focus on all the times the man in the parable says, "I" or "my."

**"And Jesus told the crowd this parable: The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 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 my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain 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 whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."**

Jesus identified the man in the parable as a fool. Why? Because the man let his greed distract him from his relationship with God. Reading this parable makes us think of all the times we've focused on ourselves and let greed distract us from our Savior. Is Jesus calling us fools as well?

## **Part 2: Does Jesus call us fools?**

The man in the parable had a massive harvest one year; so massive, in fact, he didn't have enough room to store it all. Notice that Jesus never condemned the man for having wealth. After all, Jesus is the one who chooses to bless us with wealth in the first place.

What Jesus did condemn is how the man thought about his wealth. You noticed how many times the man thought about himself. Half the parable is him talking to himself! He focused on himself; he didn't even think about the God who blessed him, much less if his family or neighbors or employees could benefit from his windfall. He was completely selfish and ended up devising a greedy early retirement plan.

Jesus didn't hold back on the man in the parable. This is the only parable in the gospels where God is an active character with a speaking part. Jesus wants to get his point across so strongly that he has God speak from heaven. And what does God say? **"You fool."** Do you see the irony from God's perspective: **"Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"** in other words, whoever will own the man's bountiful harvest, it certainly won't be him. The man in Jesus' parable died that night and all his blessings ended up being worthless for him. It's a frightening thought, isn't it, all-powerful God in heaven, ruling the universe, shaking his head at some poor individual's foolish greed!

Once again, we might be confused at first why Jesus spoke so harshly of the man in his parable. Our American ears hear the man's financial success and applaud him for investing his profits. **"Be on your guard against all kinds of greed."** Greed is sneaky. Chasing wealth is a fundamental part of our culture, and so celebrated, we hardly notice it anymore. Advertisements show the ideal life with a big house and plenty of stuff. Internet personalities get millions of views when they post videos on how to make money in your spare time. Be careful, watch out, because it's too easy to have your focus shifted from your almighty God to the almighty dollar.

Again, I'm not saying that Jesus hates retirement accounts or that maximizing your profits is sinful. It isn't. Wealth is a blessing from God. But here's the important part: he gives us wealth not so that we're rich toward ourselves, but so that we're rich toward God. Remember Jesus' summary statement at the end of the parable: **"This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."** What exactly did Jesus mean, be rich toward

God? Paul wrote in the Second Reading today, **“Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things...Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.”** We set our mind on things above by using wealth not thinking “me, me, me,” but thinking “eternity, eternity, eternity.” When I’m living like I only care about myself, that extra \$5 in my pocket could buy a burger. That extra \$5000 in my bank account could go into the stock market. When I’m living like I have an eternal future in heaven, that \$5 or \$5000 looks much better in someone’s pocket who needs it more than I do.

God has blessed us with incredible wealth. But Jesus hasn’t called us to be rich toward ourselves; he’s called us to be rich toward God. He’s given us wealth as a tool to honor him. When you have a “bountiful harvest,” keep eternity in mind. Think of your family and what they need. Think of how you can bring your friends joy. Think of how you can show love to your fellow Christians who are on their way to eternity with you. Think of how you could use your money to impact people who could be on their way to eternity if someone just shares the gospel with them. We don’t have to simply stack cash like the man in the parable, who lost all his wealth anyways. God gives us eternal investment opportunities: we can use our wealth as a witness, a mirror image of Christ’s love for us.

Because ultimately, our greatest possession isn’t anything we can buy for ourselves. We treasure some of those things, but not more than we treasure opportunities God gives us to serve and thank him for changing our lives. God looks at us, people who slip into the identity of greedy: meaninglessly storing up things for ourselves, and loves us enough to pull us out of our foolishness and refocus us on eternity. Whether you make six figures or minimum wage, you have the priceless gift from your Savior Jesus: eternal life in paradise. Jesus does not call you a fool. He identifies you as eternally rich towards God.

No matter if you’re employed or retired, father or child, no matter how other people see your identity, no matter how your identity has changed over the years, know God’s opinion of you is solidified. Thank God that Jesus died for our sins of foolish greed. When God looks at you, he doesn’t say, “You fool!” He says, “My child.” Your priceless inheritance awaits you. Treasure it, above all else. Amen.