



“MORE THAN ENOUGH . . . STUFF?”

Luke 12:13-21
Lectionary 18 C
August 4, 2019

Our Saviour Lutheran Church
West Lafayette, Indiana
Rev. Dr. Steven E. Albertin

The late George Carlin had an irreverent and outrageous routine called “Stuff.” It went like this. Don’t worry. I have edited his profane routine for a family audience.

Sorry I am late. I was in the wrong dressing room. Gotta have a dressing room because I gotta have a place for my stuff.

That's all, a little place for my stuff. That's all I want, that's all you need in life, is a little place for your stuff, ya know?

That's all your house is: a place to keep your stuff. If you didn't have so much stuff, you wouldn't need a house. You could just walk around all the time.

A house is just a pile of stuff with a cover on it. You can see that when you're taking off in an airplane. You look down, you see everybody's got a little pile of stuff. All the little piles of stuff. And when you leave your house, you gotta lock it up. Wouldn't want somebody to come by and take some of your stuff. They always take the good stuff. They never bother with that junk you're saving. They don't want your 4th grade math papers. All they want is the shiny stuff. That's what your house is, a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get.....more stuff!

Sometimes you gotta move, gotta get a bigger house. Why? No room for your stuff anymore. You move and you gotta put your stuff in storage. There's a whole industry dedicated to watching over your stuff.

Did you ever notice when you go to somebody else's house, you never quite feel a hundred percent at home? You know why? No room for your stuff. Somebody else's stuff is all over the place! And

if you stay overnight, unexpectedly, they give you a little bedroom to sleep in. A bedroom they haven't used in about eleven years. Someone died in it, eleven years ago. And they haven't moved any of his stuff! Right next to the bed there's usually a dresser or a bureau of some kind, and there's NO ROOM for your stuff on it. Somebody else's stuff is on the dresser.

Have you noticed that their stuff is junk and your junk is stuff? And you say, "Get that junk off of there and let me put my stuff down!"

Sometimes you leave your house to go on vacation. And you gotta take some of your stuff with you. Gotta take about two big suitcases full of stuff, when you go on vacation. You gotta take a smaller version of your house. It's the second version of your stuff. And you're gonna fly all the way to Honolulu. Gonna go across the continent, across half an ocean to Honolulu. You get down to the hotel room in Honolulu and you open up your suitcase and you put away all your stuff. "Here's a place for stuff. Put a little bit of stuff there. Put some more stuff here. Look! Here's another place for stuff! We got more room than stuff! We gotta go out. Can't have this. We gotta buy more stuff!"

(From . . . Funny Stories and Jokes . . . by Charley Brindley)

In today's Gospel we see the collision of two different worlds. In one world there is never enough stuff. Everyone is afraid of losing what he has. Everyone must have more and more. Everyone must accumulate, horde, grab and compete with a passion that betrays a haunting fear that one day they will not have enough stuff.

In the other world, there is always enough stuff. There is plenty, abundance and more than enough to go around. People are generous and charitable. Ebenezer Scrooge is no longer stingy but buys the big turkey for Tiny Tim, gives Bob Cratchet a raise and wishes everyone "Merry Christmas!"

These two worlds collide in today's Gospel.

A man comes to Jesus with an urgent request. He is bitter about a family dispute over inheritance. His brother got the family farm when it was rightly his. He had been gypped. He has not received what was justly his. Anxious and angry, he is afraid of not having enough. He turns to Jesus for help.

However, Jesus is not interested in being a probate judge. He has not come to adjudicate disputes and work for justice in a world where there is never enough. He does not buy into its values and assumptions. Instead, Jesus

exposes the deadly consequences of living in that world kind world. He offers a different kind of world, the world of abundance and plenty where there is always more than enough to go around.

Jesus says, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

It is as if Jesus is saying to this man, "Okay. So, if you really want to live a world where there is never enough, if you are committed to a life where accumulating the most toys wins, if that is what you fear, love and trust above anything else, then let me show you the results. Let me show you the deadly consequences of your greed."

Jesus tells the man a parable.

There was this incredibly successful businessman. He knew how to run a business and make lots of money. He knew how to make a buck and keep it. In fact, keeping it drove him to greater and greater investment and innovation. But despite his success, deep down he was afraid of losing what he had earned. He was afraid of never having enough. His hunger for peace and security and, dare we say it, the approval of God, was insatiable.

Therefore, he built more and bigger and better barns in which to store his crops. Determined to silence his fear of scarcity, his money grew and grew. He got more and more. He got richer and richer.

Finally, one day he looked back and admired all that he had accumulated. He thought to himself, "I think I have finally arrived. I finally have enough. I am at last safe and secure."

So, he decides to have a party to celebrate his success. The problem is that he has accumulated so much and is so rich, that he is all alone. There doesn't seem to be anyone left to invite to his party. Greed has a way of making life very lonely. He has put all of his neighbors out of business. Well, no matter. "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, and be merry."

If this isn't a picture of our society, I don't know what is. We are bombarded with the message that we can never be happy unless we have enough stuff. Of course, we can never have enough stuff because there is always someone else who has more stuff.

Just when we think we are safe and secure, the shoe drops! The door slams! Our number is up! Our name appears on the obituary page. God comes and says to us, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

We thought we were being smart in a world where there is never enough stuff. However, as today's First Lesson from Ecclesiastes reminds us, all is vanity! We are fools for thinking that it could be different. In the end, none of it matters. "You can't take it with you." All that stuff for which we slaved to accumulate is left behind to some undeserving cousin.

When we choose to live in a world where there will never be enough stuff, that is the world we get. It is as if Jesus is telling us, "If this is what you want, if this is the foundation of your life, then that is what I will give you. You will never have enough stuff. You will never be at peace. You will never be satisfied. You will never be able to share and be generous. What you really want is a life without me. So that is what I will give you, a life that is increasingly isolated, lonely and finally . . . dead."

So much for living in a world where we believe that there can never be enough! However, Jesus has come to usher in new world, a world filled with abundance, where there is always more than enough. Jesus points to that other world in the last few words of today's Gospel when he speaks of "being rich towards God." It is in this other world, the world of the Kingdom of God, where there is always enough. We are "rich towards God."

Jesus lives his life on a collision course with that world where there is never enough. Time and time again, he overcomes scarcity with abundance. Water is turned into wine and a wedding is rescued from disaster. 5000 hungry people are fed with a few loaves of bread and fish. And there are 12 baskets of leftovers! When the disciples go fishing with Jesus, there is such a huge catch of fish that the boat begins to sink.

The protectors of the old order, those who had built their lives and empires based on everyone's fear of scarcity, could not bear what Jesus was doing. Jesus' reckless generosity in the name of God was blasphemy. It undermined the very justice of God, which protected a world in which there was only so much to go around. Debts had to be paid. Obligations must be met. Wrongs must be righted. God wants it that way. Therefore, in the name of God Jesus had to die.

Jesus did die on that fateful Friday and it looked as though Jesus' promise of a new world where there was always more than enough was just another cruel lie. BUT . . . on the third day his Father raised him from the dead, because Jesus had told the truth, because God keeps God's promises, because God can be trusted, because God's generosity will never run out.

There is a new world with an alternative economy. Here there is no need to fear not having enough stuff. Here there is more than enough for everyone. Here our future is safe in the hands of God. Here there is no need to horde. Here we can generously share our bounty with those who do not have enough.

It is the mission of this congregation to connect this fearful, starving and desperate world to the abundant world of the Kingdom of God. In a world where everything is for sale, where the bottom line is the last word, where you've always got to be careful not to lose what you have, we crazy Christians live lives unafraid of these threats. A small piece of bread and a sip of wine are a feast! A brief dip in the water of the font gives us a new lease on life. Connected to an economy where the love never runs out, sins are confessed and forgiven without fear that these sins are so monstrous that there can never be enough forgiveness to cover them. We charitably give of our money and time without fear that there might not be enough left over for us.

Such is the crazy world of the Kingdom of God and its economy of abundance, where generosity is a way of life because there is always more than enough.