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Luke 12:13-34

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### Security

Summer of stories; summer of parables. We have spent the last four weeks wrestling with Jesus's favorite way of communicating in the gospels: telling stories that reveal something deep and true about the kingdom of God and the ways of empire. Through the parable of the unforgiving servant, we explored the difficult work of forgiveness, both receiving it and extending it to others. Through the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, Jesus challenged us to kingdom generosity. In the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost child, we attempted to walk in the footsteps of those most vulnerable. We wondered how Jesus's story-telling was and still is today asking us to think bigger, to imagine an inclusive kingdom. Is there room for me with you where you are? Finally, last week in the parable of the shrewd manager, we left church a little befuddled at what kind of ingenuity that Jesus was trying to highlight for us.

This morning, we are digging into the parable of the rich man and his barns. Surrounding this parable is two conversations. One of the conversations centers on a demand from an anonymous big-mouth in the crowd who is upset that his brother will not divide the family inheritance with him. We do not know anything else about this particular situation, besides that it sets the stage for Jesus's next conversation with his disciples. Part of the expectation of first-century rabbis and teachers, especially in rural areas of Palestine, was to be an arbiter or judge between two conflicting parties. In Lesotho, this person, even to this day, is called the chief. It was expected that this person had the authority to help solve disputes before they needed to go to

court. I wonder if Jesus refuses to answer this first question because he wants to get at the heart of the conflict, not merely solve the dispute for the speaker and his family. Jesus then speaks to his disciples, giving them a warning against all kinds of greed.

After warning the disciples, Jesus offers them a parable. At the beginning of the parable in verse 16, Jesus notes that the land produced abundantly. This important beginning to the story is a reminder to his audience that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it from Psalm 24 and even further back of how God gave this land as a gift to steward for the twelve families of Israel. This rich man owned and managed his property, farming it so that it produced well, but even in the midst of an abundant harvest, Jesus reminds us that the land holds the potential and produced the crop, and that, ultimately, the land belongs to the creator, God Almighty.

Note though what the rich man says about the harvest. Nowhere in the story does the rich man consider anyone else. He speaks to himself only. It is worth reading again exactly what he says, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops? I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years: relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" What happens then? He is visited by his maker, the Lord God, the creator. From the beginning, from the call of Abraham, the Hebrew people were chosen and blessed by God, not so that they could hoard God's blessings but so that they could share God's blessing with all peoples.

This moment is the crux of the story, the moment that all of us will have one day, the question that we might ask ourselves or that might be asked of us as we near our end: "And the things that you have prepared, that you have stored up, that you have spent your whole life striving for, whose will they be? What are you going to do with all of it now that you're gone?"

We do not get to hear the answer from the rich man, nor do we find out what happens to him or to his abundant crop or possessions. Jesus ends the parable with God's questions.

After the story, Jesus moves the conversation to the heart of the rich man's foolishness. Jesus is reinforcing for the disciples and for us that what matters most are our motivations and intentions. Yes, our actions might be misguided or downright wrong, but if we do not look at the heart, we will struggle to do something different in the future. At the rich man's core is not only insatiable greed that bears fruit in building bigger barns, but also anxiety or worry that fuels that greed. Jesus's commentary directed at the disciples is most fitting for our present moment when our news sources often push us into fearful and anxious thinking. Jesus is calling each one of us back to where our true security, strength, and hope lie, not in the United States government or our own property, for all of that could disappear. Our security is in our God, the maker, sustainer, and redeemer of the universe. God has created each one of us, knows our needs intimately, and cares for each of us deeply. We are not controlled by our anxiety because God's got this.

In Jesus's comments after the parable, he asks us to consider two examples: the birds and the flowers who have no more power over themselves than we do. If the news proves anything to us, it is that there is so much that is out of our control. As Jesus says, "Can any of you by worrying or being anxious add a single hour to your span of life?" No. In fact, what current health research is finding is that chronic anxiety and worrying actually steal time, energy, and vitality from our lives, decreasing our quality of health, and holding us back from truly living. We are God's children, created in God's image to show all of the world God's love, mercy, and grace. As the birds and flowers do, we can rest in God's sustaining and empowering presence.

After cutting to the matters of the heart, the anxiety, the fear, the worry, the obsession over what will bring us or guarantee us security, Jesus then addresses the action, the fruit of these

feelings and thought patterns: striving. Jesus tells us not to strive on our own as the rich man did, striving after those things that God will generously provide in God's kingdom. Unlike the birds and the flowers as positive examples to ease our anxiety, Jesus offers a negative example of striving. Look at the nations around you that conquer and battle and fight and oppress and subjugate you. Look at the ways that they try to guarantee their own security and cannot. Look at the Roman empire, the Greek empire before it, the Persian empire before it, and the Babylonian empire before all of them, how they strive. What has their striving gotten them? Is this security what you seek: security supposedly guaranteed by crucifying your enemies, or by storing up the harvest while your families and neighbors are starving. Is this the kind of security which you hope will ease your worry: a security that can be taken away at any moment by a larger, more powerful nation? If it is, then you will continue to strive your whole life. As much as our American dream might try to convince us, our security is not found in bigger barns, better yields, a larger retirement, a bigger house, or larger profit margins. At the end of the day when we are called into account, our lives will not be measured by our possessions but by kingdom treasures, fruit of a deep and transformative relationship with Jesus.

True security lies in striving after the kingdom of God, a new family, a new community, in which all people are cared for and all needs are met through the provision and grace of God. Our security cannot be bought or conquered or defended or guaranteed by our own efforts. God has created us to live fully in a community where people are more important than possessions, where relationships are more important than one's personal gains.

In closing I offer a few questions. What are your fear and anxiety driving you to do today? Do they drive you to stay busy when you need to rest, to say yes when you already have too much going on, or maybe to not reach out when someone else needs a friend? How is your

fear motivating you to strive after things that will never satisfy your physical, spiritual, or emotional needs? How has your striving led to you feeling more empty and less secure rather than thriving in God's security and relationship? Finally, Jesus ends with an insight that reveals where the rich man went wrong on multiple levels. In Luke 12:34, Jesus says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." My final question for you today: where is your heart?