

Sermon – Luke 12:13-21  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
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“Is Your Barn Big Enough?”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Eight years ago, Erika and I packed up and moved south from Wisconsin to South Carolina. It was a significant change for us, and I remember wondering what the biggest adjustment would be. Would it be living so far from family, or the stifling heat and humidity in the summer? Perhaps it would be the delightful oddness of being residents in a tourist community or the depressing sadness of living in a state that continued to fly the Confederate flag on government property. Or maybe the biggest challenge would simply be serving a wonderful congregation as a solo pastor. Well, as it turned out, these things – and others – all brought surprising challenges to our lives, but they were, in the end, outweighed by one simple truth: In coastal South Carolina, there are no basements. Of course, it makes sense. South Carolinians don't have to worry about frost heaving or deadly tornados, and they do have to worry about high water tables and mold, so basements are unnecessary. But the lack of basements forced us to answer a question: What would we do with all of our stuff? Well, depend on our parents for a bit longer, that's what. But just the other day – as if in anticipation of the day's gospel reading – my dad called me, asking me if, now that we had a basement in Oak Park, I would be coming to collect my G.I. Joe toys and baseball card collection.
2. Stuff. Most of us have too much of it, and for the most part we know this. Our houses are bursting, our basements full of forgotten junk. How else to explain

the movement of KonMari, a method of decluttering created by Marie Kondo, a Japanese tidying consultant – which, frankly, is a job I wish I would have thought to invent. Her method revolves around gathering categories of items – clothing, books; you name it – and then holding each one. If the item sparks joy, if you still love it, it stays. If not, out it goes. There’s something to all of this, I imagine, and my basement would probably benefit from some good KonMari. Still, it seems our relationship to our stuff needs a more drastic approach and the simple fact that “tidying consultant” is a real job just goes to show how fraught our relationship with our stuff is.

3. In our gospel reading for today, Jesus talks about stuff. Our stuff, the stuff of this world. The parable he tells is fairly straightforward; Jesus even tells us the point before he tells the story: “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in abundance of possessions.” The story Jesus tells is that of a rich man getting richer, whose lands are producing abundantly. His barns aren’t big enough to hold it all, so he plans to tear them down and build new ones. Why? So that he can take it easy for the rest of his life. Little does he know that the rest of his life is only a few more hours, and all of his stuff will no longer be his. No matter how full your barns, basements, and bank accounts are, you just can’t take it with you.
  
4. Coming at this parable from our perspective – we, who for the most part, are not farmers or barn owners – what are we to make of it? To begin with, Jesus does not condemn the man for working hard or for reaping in abundance. And Jesus doesn’t say there’s anything wrong with the stuff, that which he calls treasure. No, Jesus refers to the man as a fool not because he is rich, but because of his foolish relationship to those riches. The first problem, of course, is that the man believes his possessions are his. But that would only be true if he were to live forever. The man’s life is being demanded of him that very evening; all his earthly goods will pass to someone else. And so they were never truly his; everything we have is only ours on loan. You can’t take

it with you, because it was never meant just for you. Which leads to the second problem with the man's outlook on his possessions – these treasures are ones that *he* has stored up for *himself*, so that *he* can eat, drink, and be merry. He is not being rich toward God; he has, first of all, placed his trust in himself and, second, forgotten the command of God to care for those in need. And here we begin to be convicted, do we not? We imagine that what we have is ours solely through our own effort and is therefore ours to keep, to use and enjoy ourselves.

5. Yesterday, our children engaged in that classic exercise in American capitalism, the neighborhood lemonade stand. And I have to say, it was fairly profitable for them, especially since they conned their parents into providing all of the supplies without promising a share in the profits. When they were done and were splitting up the proceeds, Greta turned to Torsten, our two-year old, and asked, "Do you want this dollar?" To which Torsten, with glee on his face, replied, "I WANT ALL THE MONEY!" And in that moment, I had two thoughts. First, thanks for the sermon illustration, buddy! And second, doesn't that sum up our human approach to money and stuff, to barns, basements, and bank accounts? We always want more, because we imagine that the more we have, the more validated we are, the more secure we are, the more we can do and be.
6. We want it all, but we are fools. Fools to imagine that our barns and bank accounts are true indicators of who we are or what we're worth. Fools to think that any of it really belongs to us. Fools to think we won't lose it all in the end. Fools to be rich toward ourselves and poor toward God. But even though we have been poor toward God, God has been rich toward us. For into our world's imagined wisdom comes Jesus, God's Son, who in holy foolishness enters our world bearing nothing but the gifts of love and forgiveness, going to his own death with hands empty of this world's goods and a heart filled with love for those who rejected him. Jesus gives his own

life, all he had to give, so that sinners would live. And in the grace of God, Jesus' death becomes our own. In the waters of baptism, our foolish lives have been demanded of us, replaced now with new lives, clothed in the righteousness of God and called to seek the things that are above, the grace and peace of God that last forever.

7. St. Augustine once wrote that God gave us people to love and things to use and that sin, in short, is the confusion of these two – that we love things and use people. Reclaimed by God in Christ, we can begin to unconfuse them. For we were not saved for ourselves, so that we can get back to storing up treasures for ourselves. God has saved us for more than this. So it seems that the right question is never, “How big and full can I make my barns and bank accounts?” nor is it even, “Does this bring me joy?” All of the stuff of this world is the Lord's, so the question must always be, “How do we steward that with which we have been entrusted for God's purposes and for the good of my neighbor?” In other words, it's never about me. The old me that cared about such things, big barns and wanting all the money, that me has been put to death in the waters of grace, and the old you has been, too. May the new me and the new you have eyes to see and to seek the things above, the gifts of the God whose giving knows no ending and who call us now to use those gifts to God's glory and for the good of all people. You know, today's text began with someone asking Jesus to play judge and divide an earthly estate. But why settle for a portion of worldly wealth when the full riches of the kingdom are yours in Christ? Your barn is big enough. Live now and give to the glory of God.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.