



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “GENEROSITY IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL”

Scripture Lessons: Psalm 107:1-9; Luke 12:13-31

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, August 4, 2019  
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

Luke 12:13-31

Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.’ But he said to him, ‘Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?’ And he said to them, ‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’ Then he told them a parable: ‘The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?” Then he said, “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.” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.’

He said to his disciples, ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

Leader: The Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray...

Almighty and Everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, and even joyful in your sight, for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

The story I just read is often referred to as “the parable of the rich fool.” Rich because this man is seemingly wealthy beyond measure, and fool, because, here is all this food – more than he needs... more than enough! But, like a fool, he wants to keep it all to himself. Perhaps the title of the parable would have been different had this man been more like our forefather Joseph,

that child of God, who, while in Egypt, was given a vision of the future to know that a period of famine would follow a period of plenty – maybe if our rich fool had been storing his food with an eye toward the welfare of his neighbors, maybe then church history would have smiled on him...but, sadly, that is not what he was doing or saying, for that matter.

“Soul,” he says. And don’t you just love it when people talk about themselves in the third person! “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” It seems that not only does he clearly not have an eye toward the needs of others, but he is looking ever beyond his own needs, which is to say that he is not storing food for a rainy day...he’s hoarding it. He is, in a word, greedy. And lest we presume that this parable is about something else, let us consider again why Jesus shared it in the first place. A man had approached Jesus and asked him to intervene and to settle a dispute about an inheritance. Apparently a man’s brother had received an inheritance and none of it was being shared. “Teacher,” he says, “tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.”

Now, Jesus knows that that question doesn’t stem from a sense of justice. In other words, this was not a situation wherein a wrong needed to be righted. No! For Jesus to share this morning’s parable, it demonstrates that Jesus understands that beneath this brother’s question lies the far truer motivations of his heart. Simply put, this brother wants something that doesn’t belong to him, which is to say that he too is, in a word, greedy.

Isn’t it interesting, that “good old fashioned” greed is what contributed not only to the broken relationship between the brothers, but also to the desire of the rich fool to keep his food for himself. Taken together, these stories contribute to what Jesus is trying to tell us about what it means to be poor in spirit. If, for example, we want to be poor in spirit, we can surely start by being greedy because, apparently, there is a direct correlation. But then does it not also stand that the opposite may well be true, that if we want to be rich in spirit, we can begin by being generous?

Consider just how different our New Testament Lesson would have been had generosity rather than greed functioned as the primary motivation. Our rich fool, he wouldn’t have spent nearly as much time thinking about his own welfare. On the contrary, had his been a generous heart - a generous spirit, if you will - he would have been continually thinking about what he could do for God and for God’s people. And think about what a difference that provision could have made in the lives of those around him. Or what about the brothers and their inheritance? What difference could a generous heart have made in their situation? And I say “their” situation, because I think that both of them could have done a better job of contributing to the healing and wholeness of their family.

For example, the brother who felt left out could have determined to let go of his selfish indignation, a tall order, I know, but it was certainly possible. And his brother? I dare say he could have changed the whole story had he simply shared his inheritance – had he modeled generosity himself - which, not so incidentally, would have gone a long way toward helping to stop the sin of greed from growing in his sibling’s heart.

What I am trying to say is that generosity exists as a potential reality for all of us, and, the miracle is that, even if generosity hasn't been a part of our experience before now, there is always before us the opportunity to change our stories and to model generosity. In fact, every single day, a brand new chapter of our life is being written.

I was talking with a church member who served with me in a previous church family – they had just bought a lovely home situated on a lake. And, I'll tell you, had their story been one of greed - about being poor in spirit – their story would have gone something like this...

"Holton, you see that dock down there. It is fine, but I'm going to build a bigger dock, and I'm going to sit on that dock and say to myself, "Soul, you have a beautiful dock...relax, eat, drink, and be merry." But that is not how the story went at all. On the contrary, that church member wanted to make sure that I knew just how much they wanted their home, and their dock, to be used by other people, particularly the students and friends of our church family, of which he and his wife had two. Together they talked about how they hoped their home could be a regular gathering place for Bible studies or other opportunities for fellowship...a fun and safe place where God's children could gather and grow closer to God and to one another.

That member's home is but one example of the kinds of things that we all have in our possession and with which we should also be generous. And it doesn't have to be a home on the lake - maybe it is your stewardship of one of God's little ones for a precious and brief amount of time before they grow up; maybe it is your faith and your energy as an officer in Christ's Church...or maybe it is one of the various other ways that your hands would be for someone else, the very hands of Christ...and if for no other reason, than it might just be the very way by which God helps to bring about a richness of spirit in their life.

One of the great hymns of the church was written by the late Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick. It was written at a time when the United States was in the throes of the Great Depression. The congregation went through many changes while Fosdick was its pastor, not least of which was a move from their upscale Park Avenue location to a new building overlooking the Hudson River. As Fosdick reflected on the construction of the building, he fashioned the hymn, "God of Grace and God of Glory." He envisioned it being sung as the processional hymn at the opening service of worship in 1930.

Listen again to the third verse of that hymn: "Cure Thy children's warring madness, bend our pride to Thy control. Shame our wanton selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, lest we miss Thy kingdom's goal, lest we miss Thy kingdom's goal."

You see, Fosdick, a champion of the social gospel movement of his time, he knew as well as anyone that it is not the stuff - not the food, or the inheritance, or the dock, or the building on Park Avenue – he knew that none of that is what makes us rich! No! That which makes us rich is God's grace...and God's grace is continually at work to inspire within us a glad and generous heart - a heart that, in joyful response for all that God has done for us, commits the full expanse of our life to God's glory and to the love of neighbor!

Praise be to God, that such a spirit of generosity can be ours, and that we can share it with other people, precisely because Jesus shared it with us...our very God who "did not withhold his

own son, but gave him up for all of us..." (cf. Romans 8:32). Oh, if there is one thing God is not...God is not greedy!

The question is, do we trust in God's extravagance, in his grace, in God's generosity? Do we really trust in God's faithfulness and provision? I ask that because we are so naturally inclined to build our barns and our storehouses...and that greed is often birthed from an intense and unhealthy desire to gain something or to keep from losing something. But that need not be the case, because in this morning's New Testament reading, Jesus doesn't leave us without teaching us yet another vital lesson - one that seemed to escape the attention of both the brothers, squabbling over an inheritance, as well as the rich and yet foolish man whose property had produced abundantly.

"Consider the ravens" Jesus says, "they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse or barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!" (Luke 12:24) The answer is so much more! But we also know this...that so much more is required of us, for as the Bible says: "to whom much is given much is expected."

We would do well to remember that one of the most prominent traits of the early church was that, "All who believed were together and had all things in common." Imagine what the church would look like today if our possessions were, to a greater extent, used to meet the needs of others, if our power was used more in service to the powerless, if our blessings really did become the blessings of others? One thing is for sure, wherever those kinds of things happen, wherever life is lived with a glad and generous heart, there we will also find a richness of spirit!

Let us pray...

Almighty God, may we, by your Spirit, give of ourselves - of our life and our living - give of our blessings so that, by your grace, we may know what it means to truly be rich in spirit. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*\*The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.*