

Albany Presbyterian Church

August 3rd 2025

Luke 12:13-21 “Store up riches towards God,”

A few weeks ago, I shared a picture with you of apple trees in central Otago, showing a tree FULL of unpicked fruit that looked beautiful, a leftover from a successful season. The Otago Daily Times featured this story in their weekend paper, explaining how the farmer decided that harvesting the fruit wasn't profitable because of the international market price and labor costs.

A man approached Jesus in Luke 12, asking Him to tell his brother to share his inheritance. If we consider this text in the context of this gospel, we see that in the latter part of chapter 11, Jesus confronts the experts in the law and the Pharisees regarding their corrupt practices. They gave advice and judged matters between others, often making a profit for themselves and making the law difficult for others to follow. But they were deeply offended when Jesus criticized their actions, saying, “Woe to you, experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.” As Luke 11:54 said, “they began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say.”

In this context, I wonder about the man coming to see Jesus in such a public manner. Why does he come to Jesus and ask for His intervention? Of course, according to the Mishna, a key Jewish law, the Rabbis of that time also acted as judges or mediators, helping people by interpreting the Torah. So, it is very reasonable that if Jesus was considered a Rabbi to the man, his approaching Jesus, hoping to resolve an issue with his brother, and end a family feud. But then, Jesus says, “Watch out! Be on guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

And so back to my wondering, I suspect that there is more to this man's story than what we are told in the gospel. At least, it is very possible the man who came to Jesus was not a poor man, desperate for money.

And Jesus, as always, tells a story to illustrate. There was a farmer who had a successful harvest that year, so much so that he had no place to store all his new crops. To this, I thought of the apple trees. Many of you, like me, reacted with mixed emotions to this story; there were feelings of sadness, disappointment, as well as delight, and many ideas about how these excess apples can be used. I think this helps us understand this man in our story... so what do you do with all these crops? There is no place to store it; his storage is not big enough. So, after some thought, he decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. He said to himself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years; take life easy, eat, drink, and be merry.” Jesus said he is a fool because it could be that very night, God can call him home, and all that he prepared for himself will be left in the hands of someone else.

“Watch out!” Jesus said. “Be on guard against all kinds of greed.”

There is another story similar to this, a short story written by Leo Tolstoy, a great Russian novelist of the 19th century, titled “How Much Land Does a Man Need?”

A man named Pahom was a peasant farmer who became very possessive of his land. He often caused arguments with his neighbors over his land and the crops he produced. Eventually, the neighbors turned against him and even threatened to take his life. So he decided to move somewhere else, and he did, and acquired more land and crops, making a small fortune along the way, but he still wasn't satisfied. One day, he heard about a family called the Bashkirs, thought to be a simple-minded people who owned a large amount of land. So he went to them to make a deal. When he met them and started negotiating, he was surprised by their offer. For one thousand rubles, they said Pahom could walk around as much land as he wanted, starting at dawn, and mark his route with a spade along the way. If he returned to the starting point by sunset, all the land he marked would be his. But if he didn't, he would lose his money and gain no land. Excited, he agreed because he believed he could cover a large area and get the deal of a lifetime. Oddly, that night, the story goes, he had a nightmare with Satan laughing at him, while he was lying on the ground. But early the next morning, Pahom set out on this mission and marked his land as he went along, until just before sunset. But, near the end of the day, the sun was about to set, Pahom realized he was too far from the starting point, so he ran as fast as he could to reach the Bashkirs, who were waiting for him at the starting point. Finally, with everyone cheering, he arrived just before sunset. But

exhausted from the run, Pahom collapsed and died on the spot. His servants came to bury him and dug a grave only six feet long, answering the question of the title of the story: how much land does a man need? So, Jesus said, “A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” As someone said, riches and abundance pretend to be the security against anxiety, but it is the object of anxiety. (Soren Kierkegaard)

“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God,” Jesus said in verse 21.

It does not sound unreasonable to build a larger barn to store more crops you gather, nor is it unreasonable to leave the apples on the tree because you won’t make any money and might even lose money by picking them. It is not unreasonable to seek justice when your brother wrongs you.

Marcus Borg said, life rich toward God means prioritizing God as our ultimate treasure and source of fulfillment. It’s about cultivating a heart that is drawn to God, actively seeking to know more Him, and living according to His will, in spiritual abundance, and building a deep relationship with God.

And it is about trusting in the power of God, and surrendering to God, the giver of all these things. It is living a prayerful life, as prayer is always the means of grace that strengthens our faith and brings us closer to God, even in the most challenging circumstances, and even when our prayer is left unanswered.

It is like the “Yielding in prayer,” where we actively choose to submit our will, desires, and control to God, trusting His sovereignty, power, wisdom, knowledge, guidance, and leading. It involves a conscious decision to relinquish your plans and expectations and trust solely in God.

Paul says in Colossians, “since you and I have been raised with Christ, we have to set our hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set our minds on things above,” and “put to death whatever belongs to our earthly nature.” And “let the peace of Christ rule your hearts, “and whatever you do, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God, who gives us all things through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

As Jesus says later in Luke 12:31, Seek His kingdom, and these things will be given to you.

There is a prayer by John Wesley, though Richard Alleine wrote it. It is called the covenant prayer and dates back to 1755. This prayer is said to this day in the service of the covenant, the words of prayer for the life of all believers to commit our life not driven to store up things for ourselves but to store up the rich toward God. And so I invite us to reflect on this as we think about what the Spirit is saying to us in this passage.

“I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, place me with whom you will. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you, Praised for you or criticized for you. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service. And now, O wonderful and holy God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, you are mine, and I am yours. So be it.” Amen.