

SERMON: True Abundance  
TEXT: Luke 12:13-21

So, the lottery has been big news this week, as the Mega Millions jackpot was growing toward a record. But, alas, CNN reported yesterday that "The chase for the second-largest Mega Millions jackpot has ended -- with a single ticket sold in the Chicago area for the whole \$1.337 billion.

It always makes me chuckle when news reporters and others get all worked up because the pot has exceeded a billion dollars - or whatever the current record amount is. As if it wasn't worth spending two dollars for a ticket when the pot was a measly \$90 million. Furthermore, the larger jackpots draw more players, which makes no sense to me. With more people playing the game, the odds against winning are that much greater.

Yes, “somebody has to win,” I get that. And it’s fun to dream about what you would do with that kind of money, I understand that, too. And, I’m really not trying to cast aspersions on those who play the lottery. I make plenty of foolish purchases myself, and “shop therapy” is a practice I engage in more often than I care to admit.

Hail to those in the advertising business who have done their jobs well, convincing us that we always need more, bigger, and better. We’re always looking for material possessions to make us happy. Like a child begging for a toy, we convince ourselves that if only we had this one thing then we’d be set for life; then we’d be happy forever. But the high of that purchase wears off, and soon we need more.

Some people even go so far as to fight over what kind of inheritance they’ve gotten when a loved one dies. They end up

being more concerned about the loss of “their fair share” than the loss of a treasured relationship.

This was the situation Jesus was asked to address in the passage from the gospel of Luke. “Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.’ But [Jesus] 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.’”

“One’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” This is not a shocking statement. We know it well, and we can easily agree with it. Yet, I think many of us need to confess that we don’t very often support our beliefs with our actions. We work ourselves to death trying to “keep up with the Joneses.” And like the man in the parable, we accumulate so much that we need bigger barns in the form of storage units to

keep it all. The man in the parable thought that such abundance would prolong his life, but it ended up hastening his death.

Now don't get me wrong, I think it's a wise person that saves for the future. But when is it enough? We're like the drug addict whose first high is the best one, and she spends the rest of her life trying to reach it again. Each time she needs more and more to get high, and it's still never enough.

I think it's interesting that the man in the parable speaks to his own soul: "Soul," he says, "You have ample good laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." Is that really what our soul wants? No, I think that's what our body wants – to eat, drink, and be merry. But I believe the soul longs for something more, something that money cannot buy. The soul thrives on intangibles such as love, peace, hope, and purpose.

But like the man in the parable, those who store up treasures for themselves die an early death, and have nothing to show for it. Instead, Jesus says we should be "rich toward God."

What does it mean to be rich toward God? I learned that in the Lord's Prayer, when we pray for our "daily" bread, that word "daily" would be more accurately translated as "sufficient" or "enough." To pray for more would tempt us to try to live as if we were self-sufficient, not in constant need of a gracious God. Remember that when manna was given in the wilderness, the Hebrews were permitted to gather only as much as they needed for each day, and if they tried to store it up, it would spoil before the next morning. So to be "rich toward God" means to fully depend upon God for all our needs. Daily we must reach out to God who daily reaches out to us. Daily we must wake up to the realization that, if we live, it's only because of the daily gifts of God.

To be rich toward God also involves giving thanks for what we have. In a culture of over-consumption we need to know when enough is enough. We need to simplify our lives and get back to the basics.

My children loved Veggie Tales videos when they were growing up. "Madame Blueberry" is a character who is always blue because she doesn't have all the things she wants. She has pictures in her house of the things that other people have that she desires: a new couch, a new crock pot, fancy clothes. So she makes a trip to the "Stuff Mart" to buy things and she fills ten or more carts with all her items. When she gets the items back home to her tree house, it collapses because of the weight of all her stuff. And then she remembers a little girl she saw on the way to the store who had little in her life, but who seemed to be so happy. The little girl sang a song which said, "I thank God for each day, for the sun in the sky, for my Mom and my Dad, for my piece of apple pie, for my home on the ground, for the love that's

all around – that’s why I say thanks everyday. Because a thankful heart is a happy heart. I’m glad for what I have, that’s an easy way to start. For the love that God shares, ‘cause he listens to my prayers – that’s why I say thanks everyday.”

This is what TRUE ABUNDANCE looks like. Contentment. Gratitude. And sharing what we have. Going back to the Lord’s Prayer again, note that we say, “give us this day **our** daily bread.” Our bread is not ours to hoard. Our bread belongs to our sisters and brothers. Bread is God’s gift, which, like so many other good gifts of God, we pervert by our selfishness. We don’t really earn it, nor do we deserve it or own it. All that we have is a gift from God and was meant to be shared.

“Set your mind on things that are above,” Paul told the Colossian church. “Put to death ... whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).”

Greed is idolatry because when we're greedy, we worship our possessions, and we depend on our wealth to save us. But the truth is, it doesn't. Someone once said that "What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal." And I'm sure you've heard this one before: "A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, what kind of house I lived in, or what kind of car I drove. But it will make a difference that I was important in the life of a child."

That man in the parable died with nothing to show for his life but barns full of grain. And what did God have to say to him? "You fool."

Instead of seeking to be rich in things, let us seek to be rich in our souls. Let us place our dependence on God and to stop when we have "enough." Let us be thankful and content with what we have, knowing that all is a gift from God. And let us

share our abundance with those who don't have enough, knowing that God's gifts are meant for all to share. Let us live out the truth that our "life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Let us enjoy that which truly fills our souls, the TRUE ABUNDANCE of a life dedicated to loving and serving God and our neighbor. To the glory of God!

AMEN.