

Sermon 8-4-19  
Paul Purdue preaching

### **Watch Out: Life Is More Than Stuff! - August 4, 2019**

When Connie and I first married, we lived a few miles from my parents. My dad had a great workshop where I often went to work on projects. One night dad sat on a stool visiting while I transformed a \$10 garage sale find into what even today is our kitchen table. As Dad sipped iced coffee, I groused about the old table and my new wife. I did not notice or care when Dad's brow furrowed and his mustache twitched. These both were sure signs Dad's mostly retired drill sergeant skills might get called into active duty. As I finished my sad soliloquy on a few of my disappointments with married life, Dad cocked one eyebrow over his glasses, wrinkled his nose into a snarl and barked, "You're dang lucky to be married to that girl!" Now, I have cleaned up Dad's vocabulary a tad to honor my mother. A bit stung and angry I fired back, "WHAT?" "You heard me!", Dad quipped. "You, Father, are supposed to be one my side!" Without a disarming smile, the old E7 shot back, "I am on your side, but you are just too stupid to see it!" Dad, like all parents, was not perfect, however, just last week, 31 years later, I chuckled and thought, "I am dang lucky to be married to that girl." My dad loved me too much to let me wallow in self-absorbed shallows or take up a bad habit. Dad's militaristic defense of Connie was not so much a put down, but a call out into the deep end of my vows to "love, honor and cherish". Dad grew up in a love starved hell-hole. Dad knew love was not transactional but grew up from mutual sacrifice.

Someone in a messy family system shouted out to Jesus, "tell my brother to settle the estate with me!" Do we ever pray like that? Do we occasionally use the scriptures as tools to prove we are right? Jesus refuses to become a pawn in our squabbles. Jesus calls us out of the proof-texting shallows into faith's deep end of ethics, motive, love and character: "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." Jesus meets "Teacher, tell my brother to settle..." with "watch out for a subtle greed that defines you by your stuff."

Watch out for "all kinds of greed," not just the consumption of billionaires and reality TV excess. Watch out for garden variety, everyday, market friendly greed. Is not consumerism our American idolatry? Do not get smug because some other jerk is greedier than you! Life is not measured in stuff. We know this is true, but do we carefully check our accounts to analyze what happens with the abundance of our income?

Jesus knew this life-giving truth about money might not be put on bumper stickers, protest signs or sewn onto throw pillows so Jesus adds a story. A rich business owner had a banner year and wondered, "What shall I do?" I have no safe tax havens for these investments. So they stayed past midnight hatching a plan to protect their assets. Then they drank a fine whiskey and said to no one in particular, "Cheers! You did it! Take it easy. Eat. Drink. Be merry." The next morning the investor did not wake up. What became of that banner year? Did the maid drink the whiskey? When the parent snuggled into silk sheets, did they imagine their children cornering the pastor to demand, "Hey preacher, tell my goofy brother to settle the estate with me?" Life is more than stuff. Jesus wraps up the parable telling us to "become rich toward God." Are you rich towards God? In the "Use of Money", John Wesley describes money as "an excellent gift of God, answering the noblest of ends. In the hands of God's children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, clothes for the naked, shelter for the traveler and stranger... sustenance for the widow and a parent for the orphan." At my dad's funeral, some middle-aged person I did not know shared how when they were a struggling college

student scraping by delivering pizzas, my dad saw the tires on their old VW in the church parking lot. Dad offered a gruff safety lecture and then followed them to the tire store and paid for new tires. Jesus said, if you love and give to those you love, what is special about that? I do not remember how many sets of tires Dad put on our cars. However, 20 years later the tires purchased for a struggling student still made a difference! As I settled my folks' estate, I saw how formally generous my parents were and know I am a much richer person for the things my parents gave away.

Do we strive to be rich toward God? Do we release our wealth to the kingdom of heaven or cling to stuff that will not endure forever? Jesus woos us from consumerism's subtle greed: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. There is more to life than food and more to the body than clothing. Consider the ravens, they neither plant nor harvest, they have no silo or barn, yet God feeds them. You are worth so much more than birds! Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life? Notice how the lilies grow. They don't wear themselves out with work, and they don't spin cloth. But I say to you that dandy King Solomon wasn't dressed as well as a single wild daisy. If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully... how much more will God do for you, you people of weak faith!"

Mary Olliver's 'commentary reads like this:

*When I moved from one house to another... there were many things I had no room for.  
What does one do? ... I rented a storage space. And filled it. Years passed.  
Occasionally I went there and looked in, but nothing happened, not a single twinge of the  
heart.*

*As I grew older the things I cared... about grew fewer, but were more important.  
So one day I undid the lock and called the trash man. He took everything.  
I felt like the little donkey when... his burden is finally lifted. Things!  
burn them, burn them! make a beautiful... fire!  
more room in your heart for love...  
for the trees! for the birds who own...nothing  
the reason they can fly.*

Let us stop chasing after what we will eat, wear, or buy next. Stop worrying. God, our Divine Mother, knows our needs before we ask. Instead, let us strive after God's kingdom and stuff will take care of itself. Don't be afraid, our Heavenly Father delights in giving us the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Make for yourselves wallets that don't wear out—a treasure in heaven that never runs out. No thief, rust, or moth destroys what we have already given to God. Oh, dear ones, let us be on guard against subtle greed. Let us not be possessed by our possessions. We will never find abundant life inside things. Indeed, strangely our hearts will wander off following the trail of our purchases, and we will get lost thinking our things, titles, and stuff make us who we are, when are children of God. Only faith, hope, and love endure—and make life worthwhile! So be on guard against the subtle greed of consumerism and wealth. Life is found in giving things away to those in need. Amen.