

"The Problem of Money"

Rev. Greg Watling

First Congregational United Church of Christ

Gaylord, Michigan

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Texts: Ecclesiastes 2: 18-23 and Luke 12: 13-21

Money

It's a crime

Share it fairly, but don't take a slice of my pie

Money

So they say

is the root of all evil today (Pink Floyd)

... I'll give you all I've got to give

If you say you love me too

I may not have a lot to give

But what I've got, I'll give to you

I don't care too much for money

Money can't buy me love (the Beatles)

There are hundreds of songs about money. In fact, when I did a search, there are 362,773 lyrics, 125 artists and 50 albums matching money (lyrics.com)! Musicians

aren't the only people who talked about money. Jesus did, too. As Cameron Trimble reminds us: "Jesus talked about money *all the time*. Sixteen of his thirty-eight parables talk about how to handle money and possessions. One out of ten verses (288 in all) in the gospels deals directly with money. The Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions. Clearly, humans have always struggled to believe that we are enough, and we will have enough (*Piloting Church: Helping Your Congregation Take Flight*).

But wait! It's only August! Churches, contrary to our founder, often only talk about money during the fall of the year. You know, that season called "stewardship". As if stewardship is only about money, and should only be talked about once a year. Jesus talked about it a lot, but he didn't talk about it the same way we do. Maybe that is where we need to go with this discussion.

It's true that Jesus talked about money in the passage from Luke. "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." When you listen to Jesus, money is important, but not all that life is about. Musicians, financial planners, politicians, movie stars, media personalities...you name it...seem to disagree. "Money makes the world

go 'round" many say. So, who is right? Jesus, or everyone else? I think you know that answer. And yet, his church still is fearful to talk about money and often only in hushed tones at a certain time of year. We can talk about who you sleep with, whether you pray enough, or a whole host of other things you should do and are private, but somehow, we think that money is too private to talk about. The problem is, those things we don't talk about often have undue power over us -- an addiction. Perhaps you'll agree that we have an addiction to money.

No one, including Jesus, disagrees that you need money to live. Money itself is inert. Watch this: money is paper and falls to the ground when you drop it. It has a face, but not one of its own. It can't speak to us. It isn't morally composed one way or another. In fact, the only reason it has power is because we assign power to it. And sometimes the power we assign is greater than what money deserves.

If money has no authority, power, morality, face, or life by itself, then at the end of the day, it only has the power we give it. This is what Jesus is talking about in the parable for today. The problem of money is not money in and of itself. The problem of money is when it has undue power over our lives. "Be on guard

against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

The purpose of this parable is to deal with our greed. It would be dishonest not to recognize that we all are greedy to some degree. "The land of the rich man produced abundantly." First thing to understand is that the man had more than enough. This parable is not about those who are barely scraping by. Yes, they may be greedy in some ways as well, but what to do with abundance is the heart of the question. What do we do with abundance? Those of us who have an abundance, what is the Jesus prescription for what we do with that?

The character in the parable decided that the best option was to build bigger barns! Maybe for us it is to get another storage unit, or open another savings account, or buy another property, or another car, or another, or another...

A couple of weeks ago, I shared with you the lyrics of UCC musician Bryan Sirchio related to how we look in the mirror. Bryan has another song that is right out of this parable. It's called *If My Soul Should Be Required Tonight*. The lyrics in the last verse, chorus, and bridge say this:

There is always someone
Who's urging me to buy

Who's making luxury look like a need

Investments in convenience

In comfort and in style

With all my satisfaction guaranteed

And its bigger, better, newer, faster

Buy now pay tomorrow

Seduced with credit cards and toll free lines

(Chorus)

And if my soul should be required tonight

What would Jesus say to me?

If my soul should be required tonight

Would my treasure stay with me?

Would he find me rich in things

Or find me rich in Christ

If my soul should be required tonight

(Bridge)

And it's so easy to justify

The way I live, and all these things I buy

But this world's so hungry, Lord I've seen the need

Can I truly love, and keep the piles for me? (1 John 3:17-18; James 2:15-17)

The issue, my friends, is greed. The problem of money has nothing to do with money, but everything to do with our greed. What do we do with our abundance? How do we justify what we do with our money? Is there ever enough? The questions are the same for both people and institutions. Is there enough in our church? How do we justify what we do with our money? Do we have an abundance? And if so, what do we do with it? Is money really the problem?

So many questions. The ultimate one this parable asks, is: How are we to be faithful with all that we have been given?

In the many blessed names of God. Amen.