

South Bay Community Church
Sermon Reflections
Life Reimagined – Financing the Mission
1 & 2 October 2022
Lead Pastor Tammy Long

Scripture Text: Luke 12:13-34

Sermon Preamble

We continue our series on our journey of life reimagined as stewards of God. Recall our definition of stewardship: Stewardship is trusting in the promises of God, to deploy the resources of God, to accomplish the mission of God, for the glory of God. So far, we have laid the foundation of trusting in the promises of God because the promises enable us to deploy resources for the mission with the assurance that if we take care of God's business, God will take care of ours. We looked at our mission and how God invites us into partnership with God on a mission that reflects and restores God's Kingdom of love, peace, justice, kindness, grace, and mercy until Jesus comes again to bring His Kingdom to earth in full glory. Last Sunday, the message by Sister Eunice Johnson encouraged us to keep living into the mission no matter our age; God is not done until God brings us home. In this message, we will explore funding God's mission with the money and material resources God has given us. People are very private when it comes to money. Money experiences have shaped our relationship with our money and material resources. Jesus invites us to focus on God's mission as our top priority, to invest our money and material resources to fund the mission, and to trust God to supply our needs.

Jesus declares life more than riches

"Then someone called from the crowd, 'Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me.' Jesus replied, 'Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?' Then he said, 'Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.' Then he told them a story:" (Luke 12: 13-16a). Jesus has been teaching the crowds, and he gets interrupted. Perhaps the person heard Jesus talking about loving one another or justice, and the person thought Jesus would be on his side. It was common for people to ask a rabbi to settle disputes. Jesus does not engage to settle that dispute. Jesus also doesn't waste the moment using the moment to teach; Jesus was a master at teachable moments. Jesus begins his story with the main idea to guard against greed because "life is not measured by how much you own." We don't really know if Jesus was directing his teaching directly to the man, or to his brother, or making a general statement.

The person was probably taken aback. The person probably thought to himself: Are you talking about me? This is my right to only want my fair share that should be mine. My side of the money dispute is reasonable. There are others who have way more than me. I am not being greedy. It caused the person and everyone listening including us as we hear the story two thousand years late to pause and ponder, "Am I greedy?" Some may say inwardly, "I'm glad I'm not greedy." The issue of greed hangs in the air for those who hear the money story of Jesus.

A man whose main focus is his own material prosperity

"A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to myself, 'My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!'" (Luke 12: 16b- 19). At this point, people were probably enjoying the story. It is like when someone wins the lottery. We think how nice that must be, and we think about what we would do with all that money. Many of the crowd following Jesus were common and simple people. Remember that the mission of Jesus was to the poor, the outcast, and the marginalized. They flocked to Jesus and made up the majority of his audience. For many, this was a dream come true story. They were eager to

see where Jesus was going with this money story, as they visualize the crops and bigger barn. Is this a story about how God materially blesses people, as the good news of prosperity, or a story about naming it and claiming it?

So often, in Jesus' stories there is an element that shocks the crowd, and this story is no different. The farmer envisions a dream future where he can sit back and take it easy because he has enough stored away for years to come. "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?'" (Luke 12:20). The original hearers and many of us based on our money experiences did not see that shock coming. What the man did make sense. He had a phenomenal crop, with a bigger yield than imagined, so he created space for the future. This was like what we would consider his retirement fund, his 401K, or his long-term security against bad times

Jesus' response to the man for a life reimagined in relationship with God

In teaching, Jesus began his response to the man earlier in verse 19 saying, "Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own." Then after telling the story, Jesus adds, "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God." (Luke 12:21). This story is not about the wealth the man possessed. It is a good thing to manage the crops, so they do not go to waste. The issue is that relationship with God does not appear in the mix. There is neither gratitude, nor seeking God about what to do with the abundance.

The man's entire focus was on himself. The man, like some people today, refers to himself in the third person by calling himself "my friend." At first, this can be comical to us, but it is sad because we see how short-sighted, temporal, and self-serving the farmer really is. In the Greek text of this scripture of this story, the word "my" occurs four times and the word "I" occurs eight times. His values and priorities are very clear; His focus was to eat, drink, and have a good time, with no thought for anyone or anything but his own pleasure and security for the future, but, as we see in verse 20, his future was not to be.

Jesus invites us to think bigger and broader to reimagine our resources through a rich relationship with God. Jesus asserted that life is not measured by what we have and tomorrow is not guaranteed. We may agree that life is not measured by what we have, tomorrow is not promised, and we cannot take our possessions with us.

But if we are honest with ourselves, we may experience the tension of feeling that we need more. We glance in the direction of what we don't have and say with envy "It must be nice." When we do not have what we thought we would have at this stage of life, we may feel discontent with ourselves and our lives. We feel stress over trying to make ends meet, especially when there's more payments the remainder of the month than currently available money. We face anxiety when we look ahead and don't see how we are going to make it. Interestingly, regardless of how much money we have, we can all feel we don't have enough to live the lives we would like to live.

Jesus has a completely different view on money and material resources. The story of the rich farmer reminds us that life is more than what we have, and tomorrow is not promised. Jesus then goes deeper to a challenge that cuts to the core of our true humanity and an invitation to what life is really about – a life reimagined!

The Core Issue is living like: "in money we trust" rather than "In God We Trust"

²²Then, turning to his disciples, Jesus said, 'That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life – whether you have enough food to eat or enough clothes to wear. ²³For life is more than food and your body more than clothing. ²⁴Look at the ravens. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for God feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than any birds! ²⁵Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? ²⁶And if worry can't accomplish a little thing like that, what's the use of worrying over bigger things? ²⁷Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. ²⁸And if God cares so

wonderfully for flowers, that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?²⁹ And don't be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don't worry about such things.³⁰ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs.³¹ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need.³² "So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom." (Luke 12:22-32). This passage is probably familiar to you since we read it in Matthew as part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In Luke we find this teaching right after the parable of the rich farmer because together they give us a picture of our human tendency to trust in money and material things.

The core issue is that we are prone to live more like "in money we trust" rather than "In God We Trust" despite what our money says on it. Jesus helps us unpack the human condition we struggle with and feel the tension. We will have to face this issue if we are going to be rich toward God and live a life reimagined. Hear again key verses 22, 25, 26, 29, and 32 for the word Jesus is bringing to light. That key word is Worry.

Do not worry and do not fear!

Can you relate to these worries? Maybe your worry is not what you will eat or drink. Instead, maybe your worry is paying for college for your children, or having enough for your retirement, or managing debt, or addressing a medical or dental bill, or dealing with the rising costs of inflation, or seeing your savings fund dwindling. Perhaps you have been an avid saver and your future is looking bright and healthy, but you worry whether or not you have saved enough since we are living longer these days.

With all these worries, Jesus gives a challenge to each of us: Do not worry and do not fear!

There is a difference between worry and concern. An article written by Dr. Joseph Luciani says that worry is a form of self-torment, best described as what-if thinking. Concern, on the other hand, is a calculated consideration and assessment of actual danger. Worrying is anticipating problems and things going awry. Concern is more fact-based and geared toward problem-solving.

The basis of worry is fear. When it comes to our money, fear can manifest in many ways. Some of us can be afraid we will not have enough for what we need, so we can become hyper-focused savers. Some of us can be afraid we will miss out on the good things in life, so we can become hyper-focused spenders. Some of us may blend both a fear of not having enough with a fear of missing out; we can then be hyper-focused on finding good deals, spending and saving at the same time. Some of us may not think about money at all; this may be a fear of worrying about money!

We may not fit neatly into any of these categories. The key danger is being hyper-focused. The bigger question for focus should be: what is driving what we do? Like the rich farmer, the questions to ponder are: where is God in the mix, and are we being driven by our fears? Jesus says do not worry and do not fear!

Jesus' promises require us to exchange worry and fear for trust and faith God provides

"And don't be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don't worry about such things. These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. Seek the kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need." (Luke 12:29-31). Here is a promise for a life reimagined! Jesus encourages his followers to think and behave differently from those who are not followers. Because God already knows everything we need, and God promises to provide, we have no reason to worry or be afraid. Instead of putting trust in money and material things, Jesus tells us to seek God above all else. That means cultivating a rich relationship with God that the rich farmer was missing. When we establish that relationship, we are members of God's family. We are part of God's Kingdom, and Jesus promises that God will give us everything we need. The promise requires us to exchange worry and fear for trust and faith God provides.

Jesus gives examples from nature to show God's character as provider

Jesus talked about the beauty of lilies in the field, greater than even King Solomon's clothing (Luke 12:27). The ravens were an interesting choice because ravens were considered unclean animals to the Jews of that day. God is caring even for the spiritually unclean ravens so how much more will God care for you! (Luke 12:24).

What it actually looks like in building faith when we do not have the money needed

Jesus says do not worry and trust God when we actually do not have the money needed. There are indeed struggles in this world, and it may not unfold the way we want. God is faithful, and God will provide, guide, sustain, support, and give us wisdom through the toughest of times.

We build faith muscles by choosing to trust in God's promises. Like a baby learning to walk, we can take baby steps of faith and learn God is faithful to God's promises. We can learn not to worry, but to trust in God even in the darkest times. Then we emerge on the other side with a testimony to the glory of God. God provides in a variety of ways. It may not be the way we are expecting, but we have to be open to the ways that God is providing. The more we experience the faithfulness of God, the more we grow in knowing that the words of Jesus are not too good to be true, but rather the words are absolutely true. God will provide, so we need not worry. We can be concerned as we seek God in making plans. God will provide exactly what we need as we continue walking with God.

Jesus offers an invitation to live differently a reimagined life

"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need. So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be." (Luke 12:31-34). Jesus tells us to first seek the Kingdom of God. That means a rich relationship with God and focusing on God's mission as our top priority. That requires trusting in God's promise to supply our needs.

Jesus then says to sell your possessions and give to those with needs. That is the real way to store treasure in heaven. We store not in barns, but in purses that do not develop holes. Treasure is investing our money, and material resources to fund the mission of God. This brings us full circle to our definition of stewardship that is the same invitation Jesus is giving us in this scripture text. Sometimes, we think of financial stewardship as being wise with our money or tithing 10%. These thoughts would not be wrong, but a life reimagined is a mindset where we are more focused on sharing with others because God is taking care of us. When we are operating out of worry or fear for self, like the rich farmer, we tend to forget that money is meant to be a tool or a resource. Spending to live is part of God taking care of us, but money is also meant to be deployed for the mission of God.

Jesus invitation to a life reimagined is a vision for giving away as much as we could. What if we sought God's wisdom and asked how we might live with less, so that we can give away more and trust God to provide? We might begin with little steps by increasing our giving to the Kingdom, take God at God's Word, and see what God does.

In financial stewardship discussions, we often hear verses like – "Give and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full – pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back." (Luke

6:38). “‘Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,’ says the lord of Heaven’s Armies, ‘I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!’” (Malachi 3:10). Unfortunately, we can approach these scriptures with a Return on Investment mindset, thinking I will give so that I get more. In these scriptures, God is giving us a glimpse of God’s generous nature, God’s faithfulness in abundance, and God’s goodness as we try God. Jesus is calling us to change our focus from ourselves to the mission of God; Jesus invites us to give possessions to the poor. That mission is to deploy our resources for those in greater need than ourselves.

We are the hands and feet of God to set the Kingdom of God on earth. God has chosen us to carry out the mission of God. God will provide what we need, so we are free to share the abundance of God with others. We can trust in the promise of God to provide abundantly.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Sermon Resources

What money experiences have occurred in your life that impact your money story about how you respond to money issues? Consider your experiences, culture, ethnicity, what your parents did or did not do, and the economic conditions in which you have lived.

Jesus declares life more than riches

How may greed be a factor in how you relate to money issues? What does Jesus mean when he warns us to beware and guard against every kind of greed? In what circumstances might we fail to be conscious of our own greed?

A man whose main focus is his own material prosperity

For some people, why would the story of the rich farmer seem like a dream come true, like winning a lottery? What are the main focus and plans of the rich farmer? Why should this not be considered as providing prosperity from “naming it and claiming it”? Even though the rich farmer’s plans made sense, what shock was revealed to him? How might the rich farmer plans be similar to our retirement funds or long term security money if done without partnering with God in the Kingdom of God mission?

Jesus’ response to the man for a life reimagined in relationship with God

Since life is not measured by what we have and tomorrow is not promised, how does Jesus invite us to reimagine our resources differently through a rich relationship with God? In what circumstances might you feel discontent, stress, and anxiety, regardless of the amount of money you have?

The Core Issue is living like “in money we trust” rather than “In God We Trust”

What factors can result in the human tendency of trusting in our money rather than trusting in God?

What do you see in viewing nature that God provides for creation?

Do not worry and do not fear!

What, if anything, represent something that worries you? What fears might you have that result in worry? What is the difference between a worry and a concern? Where is God in the midst of our focus? What is God directing us to do?

Jesus’ promises require us to exchange worry and fear for trust and faith God provides

As adopted members of God’s family, how do we live life reimagined and receive from God everything we need for God’s mission?

Jesus gives examples from nature to show God’s character as provider

What is meaningful to you as God shows examples from nature that God provides for creation?

What it actually looks like in building faith when we do not have the money needed

What is the process as we build faith muscles to trust in God's promises?

Jesus offers an invitation to live differently a reimaged life

What are some items we can invest our resources in to be considered treasures in heaven?

How can we live with less to give away more and trust God to provide?

What attributes of God do we demonstrate on earth when we deploy our resources for those in greater need than ourselves?