

# Wading River Congregational Church

## SERMONS IN PRINT

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Luke 12:13-34

*"Security Worries"*

Jesus is preparing his disciples for the opposition and persecution that lie just ahead. He tells them to hold onto their faith in a loving Father who will always care for them, and to find their security in God during troubled times. Now, prompted by a greedy young man who wants to enlist Jesus in a family squabble over inheriting property, Jesus goes into the issue of financial security.

### 1) *Wealth And Worry*

He tells the short but vivid parable of a rich farmer whose fields yield abundantly, leading to a decision to build bigger barns to store the abundance. *"I will say to myself,"* says the farmer, that *"You have plenty of good things laid up for many years! Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."* But his retirement plans take no account of God, and he has no concern to share his abundance with the poor peasants who work his land. So when his life is taken from him that very night, he is labeled "a fool" - in the Bible always a moral category, not an intellectual one. So with the parable Jesus draws the unforgettable lesson: *"Watch out! Beware of greed... A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

Possessions are worth nothing in the face of death. Life is about more than accumulating "stuff"! So, says Jesus, do not waste your energy worrying about "stuff." There is more

to life than clothes or food. Look around you - do you not see how God cares for all his creation? He provides for birds and plants and all creatures; how much more will he provide for you! Worry won't get you anywhere: it is a waste of energy, and it betrays a lack of trust in God your Father. In fact it aligns you with the unbelieving, pagan world that spends all its time in worried pursuit of "stuff." People of God should trust him and stop panicking over where the next meal will come from. Be faithful to him, pursue his ways, because he knows what you need and he will provide for you.

And do not be afraid. Your security does not come from what you own. If you think it does, you will always fear losing it. Be grateful to God for what you have, be generous to needy people out of what you have, and set your heart on God's kingdom; bank your "treasure" in heaven where it is safe in God's hands.

### 2) *Me Worry?*

Intriguing words! Not what we would probably have told followers who were going to face rejection and persecution. But Jesus has a lot to say about wealth and possessions - far more than on many other topics we fixate on - and he knows that pursuing wealth as a means of security is a false trail. *There is more to life than money,*

and “a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Now these are hard words for us! We live in a time and place where never have so many people had so much money and so much “stuff.” Come to the Thrift Store, or look in our own garages or basements, and see how much “stuff” we accumulate, far beyond our needs! And we live in a consumer culture where billions of dollars are spent on advertising to make us want more “stuff” – in fact, we’re told that that’s what keeps our economy going, so it’s patriotic to go out and shop! Now when Jesus talks about “the rich,” the bad news is of course that he is talking about us! Rough numbers: the GDP per capita in the USA is about \$47000; in much of Africa and Asia it is less than \$1000; we are more than 50 times richer. The US median annual household income is about \$53000; in Suffolk County, NY it’s about \$65000.

So however poor we may feel from time to time, we have more income and accumulated “stuff” than just about anyone at any time. So we are the people who ought especially to listen to Jesus’ words: “A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” There has to be more to life than this. And if you have ever had the sad task of clearing out the home that your now deceased father and mother lived in for decades, you know the poignant feeling of disposing of “stuff” that is now worth nothing to anyone. Of course it meant something to them – made their lives happier, their homes more beautiful, more comfortable, more convenient. The same is true of the “stuff” we have accumulated. But in the face of death it all becomes worthless. There is more to life than “stuff.”

So Jesus says that you and I are in the sad possession of being immersed in wealth and stuff, and he warns us that it can drown us!

Accumulating stuff has a spiritual dimension: it can make us depend on it for our security, and not on God. It can make us think we have our retirement or career all planned out, without taking any account of God’s will or his pleasure: “We have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy! Eat, drink and be merry!” “Fool” says Jesus!

Our accumulation can also cause us to neglect the needs of other people. We are OK, so we expect God will take care of other people too. So one measure of whether we are “drowning” in our stuff is how much we give away. Would it hurt us to clear out our closets and basements and garages and donate stuff to the Thrift Store? How many people would benefit? Would it hurt us to give a little more money to charity – say 10% of what we spend each month on alcohol, tobacco and chocolate?

The women of our Wednesday Home Bible Study have raised thousands of dollars in the past few years through their *Mission of Small Things*, and provided heifers and goats and chickens and reconstructive surgeries and money for food that have helped hundreds if not thousands of impoverished people in what we used to call “the Third World.” And all by collecting loose change! Think what any of us could do if we gave away a few more dollars a month!

Americans give on average 2.5% of their incomes to charity. Among church-goers, most of that goes into their church offering. Our church’s average offering reflects just that sort of giving – an average of \$25 per week given by households with an average income of \$1000 or so per week. Think what we could do if we all came anywhere close to the Biblical standard of giving 10% of our incomes! Our Board of Deacons manages giving away of about \$15000 a year to worthy organizations and needy individuals,

out of our church budget of \$225000 - under 7%. Think what we could do if we doubled that!"

But we worry that we would be short of money if we doubled our giving. It's fine for Jesus to say "don't worry; trust God;" but for many of us "worry" is our middle name! And it's not all about money, either! We worry constantly about family, health, jobs, and many other things. That is, of course, a strange thing when you come to think about it. We all know the truth that worry achieves nothing - you cannot add an inch to your height or a day to your life by worry - in fact we are more likely to shorten our lives by worry! So why do we do it? We can't help it. "That's how we're wired," we say.

But if you think a little more about it, you realize how absurd it is. What is *worry*, anyway? The dictionary says it's "allowing one's mind to dwell on difficulties or troubles." I think that only tells part of the story: worry is in fact a *negative emotional reaction to an imagined situation*. And when you stop to think about that, you maybe ask yourself *why* you would get emotionally disturbed by something you have imagined? It's not a reality, it's a fantasy, and we are afraid of it! Maybe we need to be a bit more rational and not get so worked up over things that very likely will never happen!

So back to basics. Where is our security? In God or in our stuff? In his grace, or in our 401(k) pension plan, or in the future solvency of Social Security? Which looks to be in better shape right now? Which one do we have most confidence in for the future? Why? How much income and how much stuff do we really need, and how much could we get rid of? Who could we help with what we gave away, or with the money we could sell it for? How can we leverage our wealth, our income, our position, our influence, to help people who are in sore need? Could we

donate some time, an old computer, a few dollars, our management experience, to make a difference in the lives of needy people?

How are all these spiritual matters? Because to "seek the kingdom of God" means to lean on Jesus and learn to "*love God and love neighbor*" - or in simple language, *be grateful and be generous*. We show our love to God when we are *grateful to him* for his grace and goodness to us - he has poured abundance on us, and it's not all "stuff" either. We show our love for our neighbors when we are *generous to them* with our time, our talent, our treasure. If we are Christians, it should shine out of us that we are the most grateful and generous people you can find anywhere! In our workplaces, in our communities, we ought to be known as the grateful and generous people whom everyone is glad to have around!

Because God in his grace cares for us and provides for us and has given us his Son to redeem us and his Spirit to guide us, and has placed us in a loving and supportive community called his church - and our security is in those truths, and not in our "stuff." So we begin to show that we are learning from Jesus that "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions," or in worry about an imagined future!

Let us pray...