



**Sermons from St. Marks
United Church of Christ
New Albany, Indiana**



Loving God Back

Text: Luke 12:13-21

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Stewardship Sunday

I have to be honest. The first time I heard this passage I was troubled. There is nothing in this passage from Luke 12 that closely approximated on how I was raised in grappling with the issue of money. Actually, to be quite honest, I was raised by learning a series of cliches about money.

Fools and their money swiftly part.

A penny saved is a penny earned.

Your money burns a hole in your pocket.

There's no such thing as a free lunch.

Buy low, sell high.

Don't bite the hand that feeds you.

Everything I learned seemed to lean in one direction. Save, save, and save.
And then this parable comes along.

The parable is about a rich man, a farmer by the looks of it, who has a banner crop one year. One would imagine it's the best he had ever done. Recognizing that this was a once in a lifetime event, the farmer built more storage and saved up for himself so that he could retire in comfort.

Everything I have ever learned about money and such tells me that this guy did the right thing. He earned his money honestly. He worked hard, did well, and made good money in the deal. Then he invested what he had for the future.

The story doesn't seem to make a great deal of sense, common sense, until you look at Jesus' prelude to the story. He says quite simply,

“Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.”

This parable is a parable demonstrating greed and that greed comes out not by what the man says and does, but by what the man doesn't say and doesn't do.

He has a bumper crop that year. A bumper crop means that the seeds were good, the soil was good, there was the proper amount of rain and the temperature was just right. All God things. The man never takes the time to thank God for being blessed with the great crop and he offers nothing back to God.

The man is rich which means he had hired hands who helped him and who obviously did a good job for him. He doesn't thank them or give them a share of what he has acquired.

Since time immemorial there have been people in need. The man offers nothing to them.

He has gained so much and chooses to share.....nothing.

It is, in so many ways, an example of God loving one of His people, and that person not loving God back.

Every year we have a Sunday which we call Stewardship Sunday and we invite people to make faith promises to God and to the church. We've had people tell us about good things that we do at St. Marks, and, in so many ways, remind us that when we contribute to the church that money is used for ministry in so many ways on so many levels.

But I'm not going to talk about the coolness of St. Marks or what we need to fulfill the budget. Instead I want to talk about stewardship as a journey of faith. Good stewardship is developing a lifestyle of giving. A lifestyle of giving because we believe that God has loved us and that we are busily loving God back.

Giving is not a rule, it is a revelation. We are invited to adopt a giving lifestyle not because it is some outdated rule in the Bible, but because it is part of God's revelation that a generous life is the best life to live.

We've all heard the expression, *only human*. We say that we are *only human* when we confront our frailties in life.

I wonder, sometimes, if the phrase *only human* has much validity to it. In Genesis 1 it says that people are created in the image and likeness of God. This means, quite simply that we look like God and can act like God. The operative word being *can*.

The foolish man in the story behaved like he was *only human*. Often the first impulse of people is greed. The first impulse of God, however, is generosity. When we learn about God, when

we come to know God, we come to know generosity and we are no longer *only human*, but we become *extraordinarily human*.

When we are generous we are like God and when we are like God we are *extraordinarily human*. And sometimes these are miracles which surround us all the time.

The cafeteria lady in the school who manages to sneak some more food on a child's plate because she knows that the school lunch will be the child's only meal of the day is showing that she is *extraordinarily human*.

The school teacher who manages to find a coat and gloves for a child who comes to school every day and is terribly cold is behaving in an *extraordinarily human* way.

The physician who performs a surgery on a child who is terribly ill and has no hope of their family paying the bill is demonstrating how to behave in an *extraordinarily human* way.

And guess what?

When we donate clothing or work in our Clothes Closet, we are being *extraordinarily human*.

When we bring food or serve food to the disadvantaged in our midst in our Soup Kitchen we are being *extraordinarily human*.

When we are *extraordinarily human* we are generous and are very much like God. Being generous is not a rule, it's a revelation that when we share, we are like God, and no longer *only human* but become *extraordinarily human*.

Secondly, giving is a privilege. We are privileged to be around the table of the Lord.

Thanksgiving is coming up and I have been thinking a great deal about my childhood, growing up, etc. Needless to say, my life circumstances have probably enabled this.

When I was growing up we didn't have all that much contact with my Mom's side of the family. Our holiday meals, most especially Thanksgiving and Easter, were spent with my Dad's sister, my aunt, my uncle, my grandmother, and my two cousins. In my family there were my parents and my brother and sister.

The meals were epic in size but that's not what my focus is on. It's on the relationship, most especially about the privilege of being a part of a family.

This was my family growing up. We were noisy, we laughed a lot, and there were a lot of quirky people. But it was a privilege being a part of that group.

Over the years most of us got married and added spouses and eventually children into the mix. But there was also great loss. My Grandmother died. My uncle and my parents are gone. My aunt is the only person left of that generation and she's in a nursing home with Alzheimer's Disease.

There is something, however, about family that makes it unlike any other group.

Around that table no one would ever be dazzled by anyone else's accomplishments in life. We wouldn't be loved any more if we accomplished great things. What we did never impacted how we felt about each other.

Conversely, around that table, no one was ever that overwhelmed by anyone else's failures or shortcomings. We wouldn't be loved any less if we were failures. What we did never impacted how we felt about each other.

It is a privilege to be a part of a family.

Something key to this family was that everyone contributed something. Old and young everyone contributed something. It might have been buying food or cooking food or setting the table or making a dish. Everyone contributed. And it was a privilege to do so. It was 'loving the family back.'

We are part of God's family. We come and we gather in God's house, we eat at God's table, we share God's Word, and we pray to God for all that we need.

And it is a privilege. Like everyone contributed at the holidays because it was an honor to do so, so we contribute to God not because it is a duty, but because it is an honor and a privilege to do so. To love God back is a privilege.

In the 1990s, some office managers hung posters with great, often compelling pictures most often with a motivational saying. One of those sayings was this: "Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react." It's a reminder that we control our attitudes!

Jesus's parable of the rich fool teaches that attitude makes all the difference. The man had a great year and was filled with joy. His joy, however, was short lived. His attitude was one of greed, was one of hoarding and he lost his life. He chose not to share, he chose not to thank God or anyone else. He decreed unto the world, "It's mine, it's all mine," only to find out it wasn't. God loved the man enough to allow the man to experience abundance and the man did not love God back.

We are all invited to love God back. Let us do so with an attitude that giving, sharing, being generous, is a revelation, something that makes us like God. It is also a privilege to be a part of God's people, sharing in the joy of being in God's family.