

**A Sermon for the 8th Sunday after Pentecost  
August 3, 2025**



*Come to New Life!*

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[Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

Luke 12:13-21

## A Bigger Barn

We talked about this text at our parish picnic three years ago. You all joined in and we had lots of fun bashing this guy who had too much stuff, and we recognized that some of us might have too much stuff too. Sometimes, when we feel overburdened by the accumulations in our lives, we might dream about the opposite – how little could we live with?

I had a chance to try that out some 30 years ago in Boise, Idaho. I had traveled there, on a risky adventure pursuing ordination, and I had taken very little with me. I rented a room in the home of a pleasant couple who ran into marital difficulties and needed to have their room back after about a year, so I was out on the street, more or less, but soon I found a small rental house where I could live. The house was about 800 square feet. I had acquired a grand piano in the time I had lived with the couple, and a cat, so when I moved, I moved with the piano and the cat and not much more. (Well, really, what more did I need?!) I took this situation as an opportunity to live a simple life. The local newspaper got wind of my simplicity gig and interviewed me, and they took photos. The best one shows me, holding the cat, sitting on the floor in front of the piano. That photo said it all. I was a hospital chaplain at the time, and after the story appeared, people stopped me in the halls and asked, “How did you do it? I read that story and started cleaning out my closets!” Well, here I am 30 years later, and I assure you I no longer lead an austere existence. You have already heard my confession about American Girl dolls (I now have 31). But I still remember that simple living with fondness.

I’m sure I don’t have to tell you about having too much stuff. Storage units all over the country are full of it. The rich man in Jesus’ parable had lots of produce, and his barns were filled to the brim. He thought, I think I’ll tear down my barns, and build bigger ones, and then I can relax, and be merry.” That didn’t work out quite as he planned, because God caught up with him that very night.

I think back to the 1950s, an era of plenty and prosperity after the rigors of the Second World War. People were building bigger houses, having lots of children, and enjoying the good life. In the church, those children were going to Sunday School, and church buildings were expanding to hold all the people. We built bigger barns. But you remember what our retired Presiding Bishop Michael Curry said about the 1950s. He famously said, “Jesus is definitely coming back, but the 1950s are not.” There are many empty churches these days, like empty barns. You all went through recognition of needing to shed some space back in 2002, when your two parishes joined together, and you sold one of the church buildings.

My seminary, Seabury-Western, went through a similar *Come To Jesus* moment in the early 2000's. They recognized that they were trying to uphold a 19<sup>th</sup> century model of theological education, complete with residence halls, a beautiful library, a lovely Gothic chapel, all looking a bit like a miniature Oxford University, located on the campus of Northwestern University. In an act of great bravery, they invented their own austerity, selling the property, joining with Bexley Seminary in Columbus, and ultimately both schools became peripatetic, moving around until they settled at a theological school in Chicago. It is a whole new model, thriving in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But it really takes courage to go out on a limb like that. We treasure our security.

Jesus said this parable was about greed, and greed is certainly prevalent in our society now. But I think in our current time, this parable is more about anxiety. Will we have enough? Not sure? Buy some more! A good corrective for me is to think about people who suddenly lose everything, perhaps in a natural disaster, something the insurance industry calls "an act of God." I went down to almost nothing thirty years ago and found it was a refreshing experience, but those who are suddenly wiped out would not see it so, rather they would experience profound loss. That is what we are afraid of. Loss, insecurity, fear for the future. Jesus understands all that and urges us to not worry about earthly riches, but instead to be rich toward God.

I heard in a sermon by one of my fellow seminarians, how her parish had experienced a hurricane that wiped out the whole building. The congregation gathered the next day at the empty concrete slab, held hands and prayed. Ultimately, the congregation was made stronger by this experience. They recovered from the loss and took nothing for granted. They knew that the building was not the church. They staked their future on what Jesus had said, don't worry about earthly riches but instead be rich toward God.

I have staked my life on that principle, as I am sure you have too. The words of the prophet Micha (6:8) can be our guide: He tells us how we can be rich toward God, by getting down to the essentials: O mortal, what is good and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.