

**October 10/11, 2009**

**Luke 12:15**

**Facing My Desire for More**

**Rev. Susan Bresser**

When I was growing up I had two sets of grandparents who loved me very much. One set lived in the country, the other in town. Because they lived far away, we saw them mostly on summer vacations. We always stayed with the in-town grandparents because they had a big house with four bedrooms and three bathrooms and a washer and dryer and two TVs. They had a swing set in the backyard and lots of children's books in the den ... the very same room where we could eat our frosted flakes on TV trays while watching Captain Kangaroo in the mornings. They had the best of everything and they lived across the street from Uhl's – the dime store. Every day, without fail, my brothers and I visited Uhl's – because we had money. Our grandpa gave us money whenever we wanted and it burned a hole in our pockets. And we bought candy and paint by number sets and rollerskates and kites and cap guns and plastic army men and Barbie dolls and gum and grape soda and beaded necklaces and matchbox cars and whiffle balls.

We spent a lot of time with our country grandparents, too, but they only had 2 bedrooms and 1 TV. And they had one bathroom and it was new ... they just got indoor plumbing. But in the summer our granddad often sent us to the outhouse so as not to waste water. In the summer, the house was hot, so we sat on the front porch swing and listened to the stories of our older cousins. When it was supper time, Grandma often prepared the meal in the summer kitchen because it was too hot to cook indoors. I would help roll out the dough for chicken and noodles while my brothers played hide-n-seek

in the barn. In the evening, we listened to baseball games on Granddad's radio and colored on pieces of scrap paper my aunt brought home from the Farm Bureau. Granddad gave us money – in both hands – that we could only use on Sundays. This was the church offering. This was the Sunday school offering. I remember asking if I could take just one handful to Uhl's. My Granddad looked at me and said, "Bud" – he had 19 grandchildren and we were all called Bud – "Bud," he said to me, "that's the Lord's money. It doesn't belong at Uhl's."

We have one scripture verse today, from the Gospel of Luke, and it comes from the parable of the Greedy Farmer. The Greedy Farmer has so much stuff that he has to build bigger barns to hold it all. And he thinks he's got it made, but God has other ideas. The moral of the story: when you fill your barn with stuff and not with God, you're the fool and your stuff doesn't amount to a hill of beans. And of course the underlying message is: you can't take it with you.

So, how is that when you want more? More house, more cars, more boats, more stuff. I believe this is called greed; the opposite of generosity. Jesus says, "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

I like stuff. I like it a lot. I just had to have that Bucky Badger tablecloth on my kitchen table. I got it at St. Vinnie's. It was a steal. But I don't need it. Scott said to me last week, "Tell people how you save money. Tell them that you shop at Goodwill and rummage sales and St. Vinnie's and consignment shops." Yeah, I do shop at Goodwill, but I still like stuff.

I am guilty of worshiping the **God of Must Have**. Oh, you know the God of Must Have. He places all the ads on television, in magazines and in the newspaper screaming, YOU MUST HAVE THIS. And I look at my husband and say, “I need that. The God of Must Have says it is so.”

Or better yet, I fall on my knees to the **God of Scarcity**. I live in the richest nation in the world and I am swayed by the belief that I will never have enough. I have to have more to feed my insatiable desire. I think a central problem in the life of Christianity is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God's abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity – a belief that makes us greedy and not very neighborly. The challenge: we have more and more money and less and less generosity.

Walter Brueggemann, an Old Testament scholar and well-known contemporary theologian thinks, for the most part, that preachers do a good job of preaching on stewardship. They study it, think about it, explain it well. But folks don't get it. According to Brueggemann: “Though many of us are well intentioned, we have invested our lives in consumerism. We have a love affair with ‘more’ – and we will never have enough. Consumerism is not simply a marketing strategy. It has become a demonic spiritual force among us, and the theological question facing us is whether the gospel has the power to help us withstand it.” ...wow ...

Let me tell you the rest of the story of my grandparents. My grandmother who lived in town died when I was just a child. My grandpa – in his

loneliness – married a woman who frankly coveted my grandmother’s things for many, many years. My grandpa’s wife became the owner of fine china, antique furniture, collections of collectables and a beautiful home with 4 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms and 2 TVs. This marriage caused great strife in a family that had grown accustomed to my grandfather’s generosity. When my grandpa died a few years later, we never saw my grandmother’s prized possessions ever again.

My country grandparents continued to live within their means; living in their tiny farm house, driving their used car to town to do their laundry at the Laundromat. If they had a doctor’s appointment in town, they would stop at McDonald’s and treat themselves to a senior citizen discount coffee. They purchased 19 pairs of socks for every grandchild at Christmas. And they gave \$19 in birthday money every year, giving each grandchild a one dollar bill. When the grandchildren started to marry, every new couple got a Bible for a wedding gift. When great-grandchildren started to arrive, Grandma actually made long-distance telephone calls. My grandmother believed in the gift of correspondence. She wrote letters to her children and grandchildren every week; sending recipes, newspaper articles, cartoons, church bulletins, and many, many words of love and affirmation. My country grandparents faithfully served their church and they believed in the commitment of tithing.

I was in high school when my parents told us that we were making a summer trip to visit the country grandparents. My verbal response stung the face of my mother as if I had physically slapped her. I remember. I said, “I don’t

really want to go because I have a lot of summer plans and why should I go to Grandma & Granddad's anyway ... they don't give me anything.”

As an adult, I realize that my grandparents give me everything I ever needed, not everything I ever wanted. Our greatest challenge in this day and age is how we teach our children the difference between want and need, when we struggle daily with that contradiction.

This is the month of stewardship messages in the life of our church. You know what? I'm not asking you for anything. God is. But if I would ask you for something, it's that you take a moment to reflect on what God has already given you.

The church has been affected by our nation's economic crisis. The economic crisis has come about ultimately because people are greedy. It's a tough world. It's amazing how much energy we spend on worry and anxiety. In a country that consumes much of the world's resources, in a society that has more and more material goods at its disposal, most of us walk around worried. We are concerned about whether we have enough and how we can get more. We work longer hours, we don't take time away for Sabbath, and we raise the achievement bar higher and higher, and for what? Peace of mind? It's goofy, isn't it?

What about the God of abundance? And please don't tell me you haven't experienced the God the abundance. You're here today. That in itself is abundant living. Why do we sometimes forget that God is a God of abundance?

Who is Jesus talking to when he says: “protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have.”

It’s hard to admit, but Jesus is talking to us.

May we be in a place where we can hear the Word of God. May we be willing to work on our relationship with God rather than be preoccupied with stuff. It’s not about building bigger barns to hold our stuff. It’s about taking the barn walls down, so that our view goes way past our mountains of stuff.