I speak to you in the name of our Creator, the Son our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit our Comforter. Amen

This morning I begin by sharing a story which may be all to familiar to most of us who have had the experience in our own lives. It goes like this:

One day Jessica and Will came in from school and wanted a snack. Their mother had baked a pie earlier in the week and there was just enough left for each of them to have a slice. "Let's have a piece of pie," suggested Will. "I'll get the pie while you get us each a glass of milk." When Will sliced the pie, it cut into two slices. One slice was much larger than the other one. Jessica had poured each of them a glass of milk and sat down at the table. Will brought the pie and placed the small slice in front of Jessica and kept the large slice for himself.

"Look what you have done!" cried Jessica. "You gave me the small slice of pie and kept the big slice for yourself."

"Well, how would you have done it?" Will asked.

"If I were serving the pie," said Jessica, "I would have given you the large slice and kept the smaller slice for myself."

"Well, what are you complaining about? That's exactly what I did!" Will and Jessica both laughed and began eating their pie.

We chuckle at this story, but selfishness and greed is a serious problem in our world. Every day, we see people who not only want the biggest piece of pie for themselves, but they also want more. They want everything for themselves, sharing nothing with their neighbour.

Our gospel passage for today is about greed. What Jesus is doing here is emphasizing that life does not depend on the possessions we accumulate on earth, but rather on entrusting of our lives to God.

The farmer in this parable has done well in his life. He owns a large prosperous farm. His land is fertile, yielding large amounts of produce. So much so, that his barns are not large enough to contain all that the land produces. The farmer knows exactly what to do. He tears down his barns and builds bigger ones. But, to what avail? Yes, he will have more possessions in his barns. Yes, he will be secure in the knowledge that he can sit back and enjoy his prosperity. Or can he?

The wealthy farmer in this passage is seen as a fool because he assumes that his security in this life depends on how many possessions and wealth he can accumulate, and not on his relationship with his Creator, the source of all the gifts and things this man has collected in his life. When God summons the farmer to his final rest, God asks the wealthy farmer this, “And these things you have prepared, whose are they now?” What God is saying is this, in death, none of us human beings can take anything we have gained in this temporal life, to our eternal rest.

As someone said long ago, and it bears repeating, “You come into this world with nothing, and so you leave this world with nothing,” nothing but your spirit which you bring before the Creator.

In this passage, Jesus makes this very point. The wealthy farmer has lost his soul in order to gain for himself earthly possessions that will not benefit him in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus goes on to say the “wise” person would instead share his possessions with those less fortunate than herself and thus becomes richer in her relationship with her Creator.

One commentator, Nivaan Saras says this about greed. And I quote here, “Greed is the moral antithesis of generosity. It makes us worry about the future instead of trusting God, who holds the future. Greed destroys us, but generosity blesses us. This [parable] invites us to reflect on what we do with our possessions. Do our possessions give us security for the future? All our possessions are God’s gift to us, and as Christian stewards, God calls us to share the[se] gifts with those in need.  This [story] also invites our political leaders to be faithful stewards in managing our national wealth and serving the underprivileged, not themselves or their allies. The rise of gas prices and inflation result from greed and unfaithful stewardship. Companies are jacking up prices by more than is necessary to gain unethical profit. These companies and political leaders act as the rich fool who is concerned with his earthly life, not his poor neighbors or his afterlife.”

Elizabeth Johnson, another theologian, who writes on Working Preacher, says this, and I don’t believe I could have said it any better, so again I am quoting her.

“Many who hear this parable, especially in a North American context, may wonder: Why is the rich farmer called a fool? Isn’t it wise and responsible to save for the future? There is one very important thing the rich man has not planned for — his [own] reckoning with God.

The rich farmer is a fool not because he is wealthy or because he saves for the future, but because he appears to live only for himself, and because he believes that he can secure his life with his abundant possessions.

When the rich man talks in this parable, he talks only to himself, and the only person he refers to is himself: “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?” “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry’”

The rich man learns the hard way what the writer of Ecclesiastes chapter 2 realized — quite simply, that you can’t take it with you. All that we work so hard for in life will end up in someone else’s hands, and as Ecclesiastes puts it, “Who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity”

Our reality is that no matter how much we have, we are always aware of things we don’t have. Like the rich farmer, we are tempted to think that having large amounts of money and possessions stored up will make us secure. Sooner or later, however, we learn that no amount of wealth or property can secure our lives. No amount of wealth can protect us from a genetically inherited disease, or from a tragic accident. No amount of wealth can keep our relationships healthy and our families from falling apart. In fact, wealth and property can easily drive a wedge between family members, as in the case of the brothers fighting over their inheritance at the beginning of this text.

Greed is the opposite of generosity. Greed makes us worry about what we will have for the future instead of trusting in God, who is the future! It is not that God doesn’t want us to save for retirement or future needs. It is not that God doesn’t want us to “eat, drink, and be merry” and enjoy what God has given us.

It is all about priorities. It is about who is truly God in our lives. It is about how we invest our lives and the gifts that God has given us. It is about how our lives are fundamentally aligned: toward ourselves and our passing desires, or toward God and our neighbour, toward God’s mission to bless and redeem the world.” Amen