**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**July 31st, 2022**

**Prioritizing Treasures**

1. Difficult Conversations

I read our New Testament text, put it in the bulletin, and then I

went to the commentary to expose some light on our reading. One of the first lines of the lectionary commentary reads, “The Gospel text this week sizzles and spits like a backyard grill. That includes the visiting pastor or the seminarian who innocently agreed to preach on this lively text while the pastor is away on vacation.” Now, I’m back from vacation, but I thought the author of the commentary might just as well have written, “Good luck with this one.”

 I had to consider why this commentator spoke about the text in this way, and I believe it is because we are dealing with the tenuous topic of money. Finances and budgets can be difficult conversations. Ultimately, where we place our money reveals the true heart of the church. It speaks to what we value as important and where our priorities are in this time and place. This is also true of our own family budgets – where our money goes tells us what we most need, crave, or desire.

 So when we come to this complex text, we come with the knowledge that, alike an onion, we really need to peel back the layers in order to gain a true understanding of what God might be illuminating for us today.

1. Isn’t storing good?

I must admit that I first felt challenged by the text because the

Rich Man’s perspective made some sense to me. He had an excess of harvest, so why wouldn’t you seek to store it up? Whenever we have a snowstorm, you’ve seen the grocery aisles – try to find bread, water, and eggs and you might be going on a journey to a few different stores. It makes perfect sense to keep yourself fed in a crisis.

 We also plan for our future. That is wise financial counseling. You build up an IRA, a pension, or other resources so that when you can retire, you, ideally, can live under the shelter of those funds.

 In fact, we see this storing up for the long haul in our Biblical texts. We can think of Genesis, where young Joseph advises Pharoah that there will be seven years of harvest and seven years of famine – so store up the excess so you can make it through the tough times.

 So, why is Jesus giving this man a hard time? Why did he call him a fool? What am I missing? There’s got to be something more.

1. Individualism

The first element we can look at is how often the rich man uses

‘I’, ‘me’, and ‘my’ phrases. This isn’t about storing up grain for him and his neighbors, this is about his own bounty. This is for him and him alone and as he gathers, you have to wonder, will there ever be enough in his mind, where does he stop?

 This individualism becomes problematic, because it is counterintuitive to the community driven Jesus that we know and love. Jesus calls us to serve the lonely, the poor, the widow, and the hurting. When we store up goods for storms, I hope that each of us would be willing to help our neighbor next door who may be homebound. I hope when we think about our futures, we aren’t considering savings for us alone, but for the health of our entire family system, so our children do not bear the weight of our finances in our later days. When we gather things up, we hope to gather with our minds tuned into not only benefiting us but benefiting others.

 The short story is – The Rich Man forgot that he lived in community and was called to be a part of the greater harvest.

1. Gratitude

And then we have another crucial element of the text. Do you

notice that the Rich Man never gives thanks to God? Moreover, he is pretty proud of himself for all this harvest. He forgot to thank the God who created the Harvest.

 I need to take a sidebar here. Admittedly, while I like to think I give God praise and gratitude when something happens, or fresh veggies are on our plates, or simply ‘I woke up today’ – I’m fully human and guilty of often forgetting gratitude. It isn’t an issue where I am actively ungrateful, it’s just that you get used to things being a certain way. I assume there will be veggies, I assume there will be enough to go around, I assume that God will make a way when there seems to be no way.

 That’s a challenge I’m going to give myself for this upcoming month, if not beyond – I am going to be actively grateful. When you commit to these things at a pulpit, you really need to follow through. I will use my journal and commit to writing my gratitude daily. I hope you might feel called to join me in this journey, because I believe that even in a month, we will have a clearer sense of what God is doing in our lives and it will make us more faithful and if anything, happier disciples.

 Now, I’ve gone a bit off track, but the main point here is that the Rich Man didn’t show gratitude to God. That, inherently, is problematic and counterintuitive to our called nature as disciples of Christ.

1. End

I’d like to close with this thought. Money is complicated, it isn’t

just some exchanged paper at buying and selling points, it is truly integrated into our values and our priorities. It becomes a sensitive subject, whether that’s on an individual or family basis, to the congregational level, or a company budget report. Everyone who sits in front of a budget, in any of these settings, will have their own idea of where money should be spent and not spent based upon experience, and again, values. Someone with the experience of growing up in a lower-income household, might be anxious to hold onto finances out of fear of going into debt. Someone with the experience of growing up in a high-income household might be more likely to be willing to spend more because they haven’t felt the trial of living bill to bill. Now, those are vast generalities, but what I’m trying to articulate here is that people come to the table with their experience and each experience needs to be honored.

 There is no quick ‘guide to budgeting for Jesus’ that I can hand out, though I wish there was, because that would be very helpful. Unfortunately, this text points to the hard work that we all need to do. We all need to sit in front of our budgets and take some time to discern. Pray to God – give God thanks for all for which you have been blessed and then ask God to take the directive on where you should use your money. Does your money serve yourself, or is there space or excess to bless someone else? Listen, be challenged by God’s leading, and follow that discernment to reality.

 Again, I’m not going to claim the work to be fun, but I do claim that it is vital and important as we seek to be the people God calls us to be. May you be blessed as you journey through this discernment process. Amen.