

**SERMON TEXT:** Luke 12:13-21

**SERMON SERIES:** Deepening Discipleship

**SERMON TITLE:** Economics

You may have noticed: Economics is a hot topic these days. During the week that I spent cooped up at home recovering from my gall bladder surgery, I watched a lot of news programs on television. The dominant stories by far were about the economy and it's no wonder. We're in a global recession. Jobs are being lost (as many of you know all too well). People are losing their homes. Retirement accounts have been devastated. Businesses are failing. And on and on it goes.

Well, in watching all of this, I felt like I had been thrust into an advanced economics course where the subject matter included sub-prime mortgages, credit default swaps, secondary markets, and all the rest. It's been quite an education.

But that's a good thing. Economics is an important matter in these hard times and in all times because economics has to do with the utilization and management of God's creation for the common good. Economics has to do with the allocation of the necessities of life like food and water and shelter and clothing. Economics has to do with money and wealth. And economics has to do with relationships—relationships between the rich and the poor—and relationships between people and things. And yes, economics even impacts our relationship with God.

This explains why, in a sense, Jesus was an economics teacher. Now he didn't talk about the various economic "isms" we know today like capitalism or socialism or communism. Those concepts weren't even on the first century radar screen! He didn't probe the depths of economic theory. Jesus instead used the tools of a Jewish rabbi to talk about economics from the perspective of the kingdom of God. He taught about money and wealth and possessions and the

rich and the poor in relationship to God's purposes. Instead of asking: What does the market demand? Jesus asked: What does God require?

And because Jesus was an economics teacher, those of us who follow him—to learn from him as his disciples—really can't avoid the economic issues he raises if we really want to deepen our discipleship—which brings us to this morning's text.

*Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."*

- Ever been involved with a family squabbling over the division of an inheritance
- This person wants his or her fair share—wants it now—wants Jesus to make it happen

**JESUS REFUSES TO JUDGE—will not satisfy this person's greed—greed is what Jesus then turns his attention to:**

*Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.*

- Greed = excessive longing or craving for such things as food, drink, wealth or possessions. Craving beyond reason that is evidence of a crass sort of selfishness—it's all about me
- John D. Rockefeller—in his day one of the wealthiest men in America—Someone asked him, "Mr. Rockefeller, how much money would it take for you to be really satisfied?" Mr. Rockefeller said, "Just a little bit more."<sup>1</sup>
- Isn't it interesting—we've been hearing a lot about greed lately—reckless pursuit of wealth that got us into this economic crisis

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<sup>1</sup> "Opistoglyph - Topix." Topix: Your town. Your news. Your take. 28 May 2008. 05 May 2009  
<<http://www.topix.com/forum/news/weird/T2EN3FTI197KCPQM/p195>>.

- But it's not just about the Wall Street tycoons—it's about us—Why is it that families and individuals in this culture of ours who already possess the necessities for a fully decent life, find it difficult, if not impossible, to say “no” to ever-increasing accumulation and consumption? Why do we need more and more and more? More money, more space, more things?
- Can you imagine how different the gospel portraits of Jesus would have been if he had lived like us? Can you picture Jesus wearing designer robes, riding the latest model chariot loaded with all of the extras? Can you picture him vacationing in his summer villa on the Mediterranean? Can you see him living in the suburbs of Nazareth in a two story house with a tastefully decorated interior and a carefully manicured lawn? Can you picture this? I can't—and it bothers me.
- I struggle with this. I fantasize about having a lot of money so I can buy everything my heart desires—and too possess too much stuff—and spend too much on me—while others around me are suffering from lack of the very basic necessities of life. In so many ways I live as if life does indeed consist in the abundance of possessions.

**JESUS IS NOT DONE WITH US YET—HE TELLS A PARABLE TO ILLUSTRATE HIS POINT ABOUT GREED**

**PARABLE**

**PUNCHLINE:** *So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.*

- If life does not consist in the abundance of possessions—then life is found in being rich toward God
- What does this mean? Rich toward God—Jewish phrase—giving to the poor

- In our lust to secure ourselves economically—we're blinded to the needs of the poor.

**SO AS THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WHO AT LEAST THEORETICALLY WANT TO DEEPEN OUR DISCIPLESHIP--WHAT ARE WE TO DO GIVEN WHAT JESUS TEACHES ABOUT THE ECONOMICS OF THE KINGDOM?**

- John Wesley's example from 18<sup>th</sup> century England. As a young man, Wesley calculated that he could meet his own needs for 28 pounds, or about \$65 a year. Since prices remained about the same, Wesley was able to maintain this level of expenditure throughout his lifetime. But, while his expenses remained constant, his income rose. Sales of his books often earned Wesley about 1,400 pounds a year. So what did he do? He continued to live on 28 pounds because that was all he needed to live to provide the basics of life. He lived frugally. He fasted several times a week. He wore inexpensive clothing. He dined on simple food. Do you know what he did with the surplus beyond what he needed to provide the basics? He gave it away, especially to the poor. In fact, Wesley once wrote: *If I leave behind me ten pounds, you and all mankind bear witness against me that I lived and died a thief and a robber.*<sup>2</sup> Now who would he have been stealing from? The poor.
- Now I'm not suggesting following Wesley's example slavishly—but it does get me to thinking about how my life might move in a new economic direction toward accumulating and consuming less so that I can give more, especially to the poor.

**NOW I ASK YOU: AS YOU CONSIDER JESUS THE ECONOMICS TEACHER, WHAT IS REQUIRED OF YOU TO DEEPEN YOUR DISCIPLESHIP?**

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<sup>2</sup> Sider, Ronald J. Rich Christians in an age of hunger a biblical study. Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity P, 1984, 264.