Scripture: Luke 12:13-21 (NIV)

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the
inheritance with me." 14 Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter
between you?" 15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all
kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." 16 And he told
them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 17
He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' 18 "Then
he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and
there I will store my surplus grain. 19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of
grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."' 20 "But God
said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then
who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' 21 "This is how it will be with
whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

Sermon: Being Self-Centered, But God, Makes Us Christ-Centered

We are in week three of our sermon series, "**But God**…" In our first week, we talked about Elijah, how he had done incredible things for God, including some miracles. But then Queen Jezebel put a price on his head. Elijah became hopeless and depressed and wanted to die. **But God** told Elijah that he still had a purpose and God put Elijah back to work.

Last week we talked about Jesus healing on the Sabbath. The religious leaders insisted that religious laws be followed with strict interpretations. **But God**, through Jesus, said that circumstances are important. Loving people is more important than following strict religious rules. We follow Jesus.

Today, we read a parable that Jesus told. Parables are stories that didn't really happen – Jesus told them to make a point.

But before we go to the point, I'd like to give you some context. Jesus had been invited to dinner at the home of a Pharisee. The Pharisee had criticized Jesus for not following one of the hand-washing ritual purity laws. While Jesus was there, a crowd gathered outside. Jesus left the dinner and wanted to debrief his disciples on what had happened. A man interrupted him and asked Jesus to be a private, third-party judge in a family inheritance dispute. This was not an uncommon thing to ask a Rabbi. But the timing made it quite rude.

Jesus seemed annoyed. Instead of telling the man to come back later or go see someone else, Jesus said, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

We don’t know if Jesus was saying that to the man who interrupted him, or to his brother. But Jesus went on to tell them all a story about greed.

Once upon a time, there was a very rich man.
Here are some assumptions we can make about the rich man in the story: He probably wasn’t married and didn’t have any children. We can assume that because they are never mentioned. Since he was already rich, he probably had a number of servants, or at least farm hands. The story doesn’t say that he had a large harvest because of HIS hard work. It says that the ground did the work – the ground produced the abundance. Because the rich man owned the land, he considered the harvest his – wouldn’t we all?

He didn’t have enough room to store all that grain, so he decided to tear down his barns – yes, the word is plural – he decided to tear down the barns he had and build some mega barns. These were going to be some huge barns! The story says that the man talked to himself and made the decision to build bigger barns for himself – without anyone else’s input. He didn’t give away any of this abundance to the men who worked the fields. There was no profit-sharing. He didn’t think about the local widows and orphans. He didn’t see what he could do to help the community. He didn’t think about anyone but himself. The story doesn’t say the man retired, but it implied that he did.

But God? God called him a fool. God demanded his life – he told the man he would die that night. Who would get his wealth?

Does this story make you squirm a little? It makes me a little uncomfortable. Jesus said, “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

It makes me wonder…would Jesus call us greedy? Do we have an abundance of possessions? Are we the rich man in the story? What do we do with the extra that we receive? What is extra? How do we know how much we need and how much is just bonus? How much do we need? How much is excess? How much is enough? We hear all around us that we don't have enough. So what do we do when we get extra? What do we do with an unexpected gift? How much is rich?

There is a website called Giving What We Can. They exist to help people be generous, since it's scientifically proven that people are hardwired to be generous. On their website, you can put your income into their tool, and they tell you how rich you are compared to the rest of the world.

In 2024, the median household income in Reedsburg was about $75,028. If you earned that income and were a family of 4, you would be in the richest 13% in the world. You would be richer than 87% of the world.

How much income does it take to get to the top 1% of the richest people in the world? An income for two of $136,620. We are very rich by world standards. Are we the rich man simply amassing more wealth?

Let's look again at the ending of this story. Jesus said, "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'" Because the man didn't have any meaningful relationships in his life, he wasn't even able to pass his wealth on to family or friends – or to people who needed it. He was the definition of selfish. Jesus continued: "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God." THIS sentence determines whether or not this story needs to make us feel uncomfortable.

We store things up for ourselves. We do. But are we rich toward God? Not do we put a little in the offering plate. Are we RICH toward God? Do we give extravagantly out of our riches?

Do we give richly to the church – yes, the heat and lights and insurance and the cost of staff – so that together we can make a tremendous difference in each other's lives and in lives around this community and the world.

Do we give richly to our missional giving? - Yes. We have done tremendous action towards sharing God's love through our giving (just remember the powerpoint last week).

Do we give to other organizations that God has put on our hearts? – The American Cancer Society or St Jude's or public television and radio or organizations that help veterans or others some of us have never heard of?

Are we rich in our relationships? Are we rich in giving away our time? Are we rich toward our families? Are we rich toward our friends? Are we rich in relationships with our church family? Are we rich toward our neighbors – even our annoying neighbors?

This passage does not say that you have a problem if you are rich – even at our level of richness. The passage says the problem is **if you are not rich toward what is important to God**.

Listen to what 2 Corinthians 9:10-11a tells us. "For God, who gives seed to the farmer to plant, and later on good crops to harvest and eat, will give you more and more seed to plant and will make it grow so that you can give away more and more fruit from your harvest." Yes, God will give you much so that you can give away much. The more you give away, the more you get, so you can give more away. It's a cycle of generosity.

Today's story is about the Rich Man's relationship with money, his relationship with God, and his relationship with people. The rich man only had a relationship with himself. He did not love God with all his heart. He did not love his neighbor as himself.
We are rich by world standards. It is easy to be self-centered, centered on keeping what we have. **But God** says be rich toward the things that matter: loving God and loving our neighbor. Let us be Christ-centered. Amen.