

**A Personal Treasure**  
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost  
Luke 12:13-21

Everything was going along so well until I had to share. It was the week after Christmas during a school Christmas break in 1995. I was in the seventh grade and my brother was in the sixth grade. On Christmas morning we unwrapped a great Christmas present together. Actually, the present was a piece of paper with a phone number on it. It was the phone number for an operator at the local cable company. Upon calling that number and talking to the operator my brother and I would be able to surf the Sega Channel. It was a channel that connected to our Sega Genesis video game system and allowed us to play hundreds of different video games that would rotate on a monthly basis. Needless to say, my brother and I were pretty excited.

I remember being the most excited about the next morning after Christmas. I was an early riser while my brother would often sleep into the later morning. I knew that I would have a good two hours or so of “Sega Channel surfing” before my youngest brother would even wake up. The plan worked and everything was going so well until I had to share. My brother got up and came into the room. A person came into the middle of me and the toy and changed everything. I now had to consider the other person. I know had to split my time with the toy in half! My brother’s presence led to more fights as I did not want to give the control I had. A person (my brother) came into the middle of me and the toy and his presence brought to the surface a great problem—the possession was starting to possess me. This Sega Channel toy was leading me to think more about the thing and less about the other.



This painting is titled *The Miser* by Margret Hofheinz-Döring, 1910-1994. One glance at the painting and the title makes sense. The person is huddled in his home over a pile of his prized monetary possessions. The pile of wealth gives off a glow that lights up the entire room of the home. But the artist’s choice to paint the person in the painting black seems to suggest her belief that this hoarding action has a harmful effect on the hoarder. I would like to suggest that the posture of the individual in the painting was the posture of the certain man who came to Jesus as we heard in the Gospel reading. Jesus even told a parable to the man to get him to realize it.

The man in the Gospel reading was concerned primarily about acquiring more. This makes sense in 1<sup>st</sup> century context, wealth was scarce and possessions were rare. There was always the temptation to hoard what you have. So this man was concerned primarily about being rich and successful on earth and was not so concerned about the effect it would have on his relationship toward others or toward God. It is a first commandment issue—what is the man fearing, loving, and trusting in above all else. Jesus tells the particular parable to this man because he is concerned about his eternal well-being, not just his physical, earthly well-being.



This is the first painting that we saw a moment ago that is painted on a person’s face. Upon brief reflection, the intended message of the painter becomes clear—I too am the miser! I have that same problem! I have the same tendency to hoard what I have in such a way that is harmful to me,

to others, and in my eternal relationship with God. There is always before me the temptation to be concerned primarily about being rich and successful and creating a reputation and identity for myself with the stuff and possessions, and materials here on earth rather than being concerned about richness toward God.

I told you that story at the beginning about me, my brother and the Sega Channel. The person (my brother) came into the middle of me and the toy and his presence brought to the surface a great problem—the possession was starting to possess me. The possession was leading me to think more about the thing and less about the other. I needed to be reminded that life does not consist of just me and things.

Rather, our God is a God of community and conversation. The one who is one God in three persons saw that Adam, his prized creation was alone and that it was not right. He made a helper fit for him. We live in community and conversation with other people. God puts us into relationship with other people (theological confession) and they can lead us to consider our relationship with stuff and the treasures of this world. These people may be used by God to help us realize that we are being concerned too much about being wealthy and successful here on earth. But God's way is also to bring his riches and treasures of heaven *to you* even as you live here on earth.

God brings a person to you for your benefit. He brings a person that comes between you and your possessions and he comes to remove the guilt that you have as you are convicted of the unhealthy relationship that you have developed with the possessions of your life and the stuff and material things of this world. God gives you a person that removes that guilt by forgiving it through a sacrifice. Through the sacrifice of that person God takes your guilt away, places it upon him, and puts it to death so that it cannot come between you and him or you and others. Through a person that comes between you and the unhealthy bond we develop with the treasures of this world, God gives you the riches of his forgiveness, a new life of eternal rewards. God saves you from a life of vanity that only consists of the abundance of possessions in this world—a life that is only concerned about creating a meaning, an identity, and security with the stuff of this world that cannot truly and eternally give you meaning, identity, and security.

Through the person of Jesus and the person of the Holy Spirit God baptizes and unites you to "*personal treasures*" that have the power to mold, shape, conform, and transform you day by day into a person that values more and more the riches of God first and foremost and the accumulation and abundance of possessions less and less.

Through the person of Jesus and the power of the Spirit God continues to work personally with his Gospel to loosen the grip and the hold that money, material wealth, and possessions have on even the baptized Christian.

Through your continual remembrance of the promise he made to you in the waters of your Holy Baptism, you receive the treasures of heaven *personally*. This is what four of our younger members of Atonement will be doing for the first time this morning as they receive the *personal* treasure of the presence of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. We also hear the powerful message of the Gospel of forgiveness found in his written and proclaimed Word. Through it God also shapes you as his treasured *personal* possession so that he can use you as the person that comes in the middle to help the life of another. Amen.