

Glen Ridge Congregational Church  
The Rev. John Sampson  
“The Climate of the Heart”



Luke 12:13 – 21  
August 3, 2025

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

Did you ever see that movie *Crash*? So, there's a number of movies called *Crash*, but the one I'm thinking of is the one from I think it's 2004. It won the Academy Award for best picture that year. And this is how I remember the movie. It's about different individuals and couples and families that have their lives in different ways connected and interwoven together. And at some point along the way, everybody experiences a crash. It starts with a literal car crash, but for all of the different characters, there is some kind of crash, some kind of traumatic moment that happens in their lives. And what this leads to is a moment in which they sort of wake up out of the inertia of their lives and they get this clarity and they're able to see their lives in a different way. They're able to see who they are, what their relationships are like, what they're up to. And it's a moment of choice for them. It's a moment in which they get to decide, do I want to still be this person, or do I want to be

someone else? Am I happy with the relationships I'm in as they are, or would I like them to be different?

For some of the characters, the pull of the gravity of their lives as they have known them is too strong and they kind of go back to sleep. For others, they look at their lives and they say, "I want something different." And they choose a new path, and it takes them in a new direction.

I think the parables of Jesus are meant to be these moments of crashing, moments in which Jesus invites us to wake up out of the inertia of our lives to take stock of who we are, what our relationships are like, the direction where we are heading, and in a very conscious way make choices. These are moments not only for us to choose, but they are moments in which the values and the vision of the kingdom of God break through into our world and make this invitation to us.

Today we have, like I said, one of these moments. It's a setup just like the setup we had a couple of weeks ago with Mary and Martha. It's about sibling problems with sibling dynamics. Some sibling isn't doing what the other sibling wants them to do. And instead of going and talking to that person, they go to Jesus and they try to leverage Jesus to get what they want. In this case, it's about an inheritance. Jesus, make my brother, give me my portion. It's not wrong to think this. It's within the Torah itself, the sort of legal framework of how inheritance was supposed to be distributed. The person who came to Jesus, I don't think thought they were doing anything wrong by asking this. And just like in that story of Mary and Martha, they are sorely mistaken because Jesus does not call out the sibling.

Jesus calls out the one who approaches him. And then he tells a parable. He tells a parable about a rich man who wants to be even richer, a man who has a barn stuffed with food and things and he wants more. He wants so much more that he's got to build a new barn because the old barn isn't big enough. And he thinks to himself, "If I just have this bigger barn, and if this bigger barn is full, then I'm going to be on easy street. I can do what I want. See who I want. No more commuting into the city. Vacation on my time, not somebody else's schedule. Sounds pretty good.

And yet, Jesus asks us to think about where these dreams of wealth come from. What is the climate of our hearts as we make these kinds of plans? What is it that we are truly after as we accumulate wealth and material possessions that don't just sustain us but allow us to retire? When I read this story, I thought, not so much now that I'm a pastor, but certainly when I was in the corporate world, how retirement was exactly an echo of this rich man and how he thought about his future.

You've got to save as much money as you can. You have to squirrel it away so that you can then live the true life you want to live. Our retirement funds, our investments are often presented as ways to secure our future and our dreams, allow us to pursue our loves. And there is nothing wrong with any of that.

And there are these silences within this story. The man who is filling his new, bigger, better barn with as much as it can possibly hold hasn't actually produced this wealth. It said in the reading, "The land has produced the wealth." As a landholder in these ancient days, he wouldn't have been out there working the fields himself. He would have had a whole crew of people there working his land. He never thanks God for the affluence and the abundance he has received as a gift. Instead, it's as if he holds up a mirror to himself and he says, "I produced this wealth. This is my wealth. No one else helped me but myself. I am under no kind of obligation, no sense of love and community to share this wealth. All this wealth will be for myself."

As God's values break into our lives, they have the possibility of revolutionizing how we think about even the most mundane prosaic parts of our lives, of how we spend our money, of what we do with our material possessions. They ask us to take a moment to think about how these things reflect the climate of our hearts because Jesus is always after our hearts. He's just using these different doors and windows to get in there.

How do you think about money? Because really this story is not only for those people who first heard it. It is also for us. How are you using your money and your material possessions? And what does it say about the state of your heart? I think we can often hear these parables and feel like, oh, it's strict Jesus wagging his finger at us. Thou shalt. But I prefer to think of Jesus as someone who loves us, thinks and wants only the best for us, and is inviting us to wake up and to be the people and the children that God has created us to be.

And so, I invite you over this next week, think about your money, think about your material possessions. What are you thinking when you go to the ATM machine? What is that conversation with your broker like? If your children are coming to you saying, "What should I do? Should I rent this apartment or buy this house?" What are you sharing with them? Do you have anxieties around money? Do you find you need certain kinds of possessions?

And again, I'm not wagging my finger at anyone. I look out into this audience and I see so many people who are generous in their giving, not to just to this church, but to the wider community. I see so many people who are generous with their time and their energy, not just for this church, but for the wider world. But I think Jesus asks us periodically to check in again, to allow ourselves to be shaken out of the routines of thought and heart that we may find ourselves in and re-evaluate and perhaps choose another way forward.

I once heard a statistic that if a preacher preached as much about money as Jesus talked about it, that someone like me would be preaching every fifth Sunday about money. This is not something ancillary to Jesus and his vision for this new community he's asking us to join and to build together. It is central because again it is a window into our hearts. So next week we're actually going to hear another story about Jesus talking about money.

And so I give you homework in this next week. Really pay attention to what you're doing with your money, how you're thinking about your money, how you're using your money or not using your money. So that when you come when we all come together again next week and we hear again the words of Jesus talking about us, inviting us to think about our values around our wealth and our prosperity, our own experience will be fresh and top of mind, top of heart.

Amen.