

Glen Ridge Congregational Church  
The Rev. John Sampson  
“What If Today Was the Last Day?”



“Woman before the Rising Sun” by Caspar David Friedrich

Luke 12:32 - 40  
August 10, 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.

So, did you do your homework? For those of you who were here last week, I gave you a homework assignment and it was to think about how you were feeling whenever you interacted with your money. Whether you went to the ATM machine or you were on the phone with your broker, when you were paying bills, when you were refinancing your house.

I was speaking to one member this past week and she said she was thinking about the homework assignment because she had a big financial obligation that was due this week, the beginning of many to come." And I said, "Well, how did it feel?" And she said, "I was really anxious. Having to write that check made my heart palpitate." And so we talked about her anxiety a little bit, but then I asked her, "Well, was there anything good about that moment?" And she said that because of the blessing of some generational wealth in her family, it was an easier situation to deal with. She said, 'If I didn't have that bequest, it would have been a lot harder for me to make this work.'

What about you? Did anyone else throughout the week think about a time in which you interacted with money or property? How did that go for you? What kinds of emotions did that raise for you?

Last week, Jesus was talking about money, but I was saying that I think money is really just the window into what Jesus is really talking about. I think he's really talking about our hearts. What's going on in our hearts that leads us to have different approaches and experiences with money and with property?

Today's reading, he's back at it. He tells us to sell our possessions and give them as alms.

Does that make you anxious? After today, after this gathering, are you going to go home and put your house on the market? Are you going to sit down and just empty your bank account? Are you going to sell your car? Maybe. But as our youth showed us, sometimes it's hard to give up that money and that property. No matter where it came from, no matter how it came into our possession, it can still be hard to let go. And then, as if that isn't anxiety-producing enough to hear the Christ tell us to sell our possessions and give them away as alms, he tells these stories which can be heard as stories where he's telling us you better watch out. You better not be found to have been told to do what I told you to do.

It's a lot for us to take in. Now, I personally believe that Jesus always is challenging us, always challenging our assumptions, our prejudices, the inertia of our lives. He's always challenging us to wake up and see the world anew. But I always take that as an invitation of Jesus saying, "Listen to these words. See my example. Be changed. Because if you can change, you will find a certain kind of salvation in that." So, maybe we can hear these words of being awake, being on guard, not as a threat, but as an invitation.

I wonder if these words can change our minds. I wonder if they can become the key to unlocking a way in which we can have less of a hold on our money and our possessions.

What would you do if this was the last day of your life? If by this time tomorrow you would no longer be alive, how would you spend this day?

For some of us, we would say we want to spend it with family, or I want to eat my favorite meal. Or tomorrow morning, I want to go down to the shore and see the sun rise one last time.

If this was your last day and somebody came to you and said, "Hey, could I have your car?" Wouldn't it be easier to say yes? Somebody came to my house. I don't have all these kinds of fancy possessions. But if somebody came to my house and said, "Can I have your fancy La Creuset pots?" I'd say, "Sure, you can have them. What do I need them for in this final day of mine?"

I talk theoretically, but I think many of us have had the example or the experience of being with relatives who had more days behind them than in front of them. And for some people in this situation, they have a certain kind of generosity, don't they?

"Oh, you've always liked this picture. You can have it."

"Hey, I'm going to set up this bank account for you and I'm going to put all this money in it."

"Hey, you always wanted and admired Auntie Mildred's crystal glasses. Sure, you can have them."

As our sense of time changes, it becomes perhaps easier to manifest a generosity that at other moments in our lives we couldn't attain.

In our tradition, our spiritual ancestors have always talked about two kinds of time and they go by their Greek names. The first is *kronos*, and that's the word that we get chronological from. It's a kind of time that has a past and a present and a future. It's a linear time that moves forward. That's the time we most often live in. It's the time where we go to work. It's the time where we raise our families. It's the time where we plan for the future.

But there is another kind of time called *kairos*. It is time as experienced from God's perspective. A time in which past and future fall away and there really is only the present. An eternal present that breaks through into the linearity of our lives. I think what these stories Jesus is telling us ask us to do is allow that different sense of time to come into our lives and touch us in a time in which there is really only a present. In this kind of time, do we still hold on to our possessions in the same way? Do we still use our money in the same way? Or does it become easier to release these things and give them to those we love and perhaps even to strangers because God is close and palpable. We get the same idea later in a letter from Paul in which he says, "Don't get married. Don't waste your time with that." He goes to the root of one of the fundamental social conventions of his time and of our time and he invites us not to go down that path. And he says it because he understands that time is short. He has this sense of the present, of the coming of the future quicker than any of us could imagine. And he says, "Don't waste your time getting married. Unless you sin, then get married." I don't know about you, but if I were ever to be married on my wedding night, I would not want to hear, "I only married you because I was afraid of sinning." That would be our first big fight.

If we allow an interruption in our sense of time, if we imagine this is our last day, if we live in a moment, a blessed and eternal moment, Jesus tells us we can be transformed in the way we relate to our material things. And he says, "If we are revolutionized, it will be as if we have stored up a truer kind of treasure. One that doesn't pass away. One that we don't have to slave away earning. One that we don't have to have anxiety about letting go of. And to me, that sounds like an amazing gift.

So, I know it's summer, but I'm going to give you another homework assignment. Sometime this week as you find yourselves in some kind of situation. Maybe it's about money. Maybe it's just about an interaction you're having at a store. Maybe it's what you're watching on TV. Imagine that this is your last day. Imagine that you are only here and now and think about how you might be different in that moment.

Is it really going to matter so much when somebody comes to you and asks you, could you help me out financially? Is going to matter in the same way when people aren't living up to our expectations of them. Is it really going to matter if we're not the person we had hoped we would be and we just are who we are? I doubt it. And that's a great gift, an amazing gift that the Christ offers to us.

Amen.