

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23  
Colossians 3:1-11  
Luke 12:13-21

If you have the occasion to visit an airport, you'll see signs saying that the security level is "Orange". Those signs are about terrorism, but there are many more issues of security in our lives.

At times like these, many of us are longing for a sense of security about the future. There were plenty of people who thought that they were in a good place. Many jobs seemed secure – or after years of careful planning, folks were planning retiring in the nearer future. With the economic downturn, all of that was thrown into question. Jobs are in question. Retirement savings are decreasing because of the market. Minimum wage and social security aren't keeping up with the increasing cost of American living. Providing food and shelter, medical care and transportation can be so expensive. These are some of the unavoidable things in life. Even with these, it's amazing how quickly things get out of control.

The financial experts are everywhere on TV these days. They are taking this economic downturn as a time to teach us. We need to save, save, save. At a minimum, save three months' – or six months' – or nine months' – worth of the cost of living. Families like ours are trying to build in this kind of safeguard for the future. But it's difficult to draw the line for our hearts. How much is enough to be prepared? It doesn't take much for unexpected bills to pile up, and then the stress kicks in again.

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Secretly, we want to be the rich man in today's parable. We want to have more than enough money tucked away so that we don't need to worry. Whatever comes our way, then we would be prepared. As in the parable, we long to say to ourselves, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years: relax, eat, drink, be merry." (Lk 12:19) Then we could finally kick back and live as we want without worry.

As a congregation, we have been blessed by this kind of money in the bank for many years. Financial gifts from members who died a while ago have been supporting the ministry of Emanuel's for a while. That money has been a blessing, which has contributed to us being Christ's church in this place. We have used that money as we reached out and served, as we taught and baptized and blessed. Now we are nearing the end of those gifts. Soon we won't be able to rely on them in order to pay the costs of doing ministry as we have been. You received the letter a couple weeks ago. Your council and the synod leaders are doing their best to explore where God may call our ministry right now. We hope that the Holy Spirit will draw us to change and to new life in the midst of that.

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Should we or our congregation be consumed by planning for an unknown future? What are our lives about anyway? Is life about stacking up as much money or stuff as possible, just in case?

In Jesus' parable, God says to the rich man, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (Lk 12:20) With that statement, Jesus puts our money and belongings in perspective. We all know that we can't take our belongings with us when we die. Money and stuff are tools that support and serve the core of what happens in our lives. They help us to survive – providing for our needs with things like food and

shelter. Through them, God helps us to grow as people by developing our gifts through education and training and wisdom. If we dig down to our deepest joys, they don't really have to do with the "things," right?

Our Christian vocation calls us to share in Christ's mission for the world – to serve the poor, free those whose lives are imprisoned, help those who are blind to God's love and care to see. The Spirit of Christ is working good in our world in these kinds of ways. As members of Christ, we have the honor and the blessing of participating in that loving recreation. We can contribute to the coming of God's kingdom of justice and love and mercy. If we choose, our money and belongings, our time and energy, can be directed toward sharing God's good news with the world. This is the kind of richness or wealth that our souls and lives can have. It's meaning that we can't buy, blessing that's not for sale. Life's not about stashing a fortune in our bank accounts, or making sure we can pay for every possible bill that comes. Nothing can guarantee us a smooth sailing, perfectly pleasant and comfortable life. Certainly not money. God won't do that either.

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What does this mean for us as people? What does this mean for our congregation? How can we be both wise and faithful stewards of the money and possessions in our lives?

Our scripture readings bring us face to face with a fact that we already know. Despite our hopes, we don't need more money – or things. We have far more than enough right now. All that stuff doesn't buy us the security that we long for anyway. God is the one who can help us feel more secure, amid all the storms and uncertainties of our lives. We're not offered a bottomless bank account line as reassurance. Instead, we receive God's promises to provide us with what we most

need. Even when it doesn't seem like we deserve it at all, God helps us make it through the rough times, which we will all have.

Our lessons raise hard questions today about the taboo topic of money. None of us wants for our lives or our souls to be sucked in, like the rich man in our parable. But it's hard to find ways of dealing with these questions, without opening ourselves up and being more vulnerable. Our friendships and relationships in the church should be a place where we can figure this stuff out together. In this space, God can help figure out how to be disciples who live and love, with all that we have. And how to deal with the dreams of what we wish we had.

Let us pray. Generous God, we give thanks for your many gifts of life and love, forgiveness and mercy. It is hard for us to know how to live faithfully with all that you have given us, our money, our possessions, and our dreams. We do not want to fall in the ways of greed, of any kind. Be with us and guide us as we seek your ways. Bless us with holy companions and conversations. Show us your vision of hope for us, our congregation, and our world. In your Son's name we pray, Amen.