



**August 5, 2007**

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

Luke 12:13-21

## “Christ calls us to be treasure-hunters”

Our family has enjoyed an adventure movie through the years in which a lonely romance novelist ends up in South America trying to rescue her kidnapped sister. She winds up saving her sister, meeting a handsome, dashing adventurer, and unearthing a valuable gemstone. (Romancing the Stone). Near the end of the story, however, the young man disappears, in search of the gem that’s been lost. The novelist returns to the U.S., to her lonely life punctuated with fabulous sales of her newest books. At the very end of the story, the fairy-tale ending makes its long-awaited appearance. The adventurer returns for the novelist, true love triumphs, and the happy future of the couple is assured by the wealth obtained through the sale of the rediscovered gemstone.

Stories of treasure and treasure hunters have an enduring appeal. They have been told in various forms throughout the ages. Movies like, *Goonies*, which my adult children enjoyed when it was first released, still fascinate kids today. It’s one of my six year old grandson’s favorites. Usually the finding of the treasure requires a key of some kind: secret knowledge, a password, decoding a mysterious map. The discovered treasure changes the lives of the lucky finders forever--- bringing happiness and prosperity for all concerned.

In our day-to-day lives, we ourselves are easily caught up in dreams of discovering treasure that would solve all our problems. What are the “keys” that sing siren songs to us, promising to unlock the door to unimaginable treasure? The lottery is one—if we just obtain the magic numbers, we’ll be set for life. Secure jobs,

comfortable homes, shiny cars with Global Positioning Systems—these sometimes look like they might be keys to the “good life” we yearn for.

To get these things, we work longer hours, we sacrifice time with loved ones, we accept long commutes and extensive travel requirements. Family size is smaller than in the past, extended family lives at a distance, most adults in every home work at least part-time—but we have a new love affair with huge, multi-story mega-houses (McMansions). We have smaller families spending less time than ever before in homes that offer 4,000 square feet of living space.

What are we doing? Well, we’re seeking treasure, I guess.

Jesus had something to say about this. Our lesson from Luke presents what is known as the “parable of the rich fool”.

Let’s remember some of the points in this parable.

First, the man in the story is identified as a rich man. He **ALREADY**, at the start of the tale, has great wealth.

Second, his land has produced so abundantly that his existing storage structures could not hold everything. Since he already was a rich man, he probably already had quite a few barns and sheds. The fact that the crop was remarkable suggests that it was not simply a regular “good year”, but likely something so out of the ordinary that you might need to consider it **MIRACULOUS**.

The rich man is faced with how to respond to an incredible blessing. And how does he respond? Does he consider sharing any of the bounty? No.

Most people I talk with who plan how they’d spend their money if they every won the lottery mention relatives and friends they would share with. But this man thinks of no one and nothing but himself. All his thoughts, all his conversations are with himself. He even addresses himself, encouraging himself to feast off his bounty: “Eat, drink and be merry.”

The parable almost seems like a parody at this point-- because the man **TEARS DOWN** his existing storage buildings and erects new ones. Why on earth would anyone do that? It seems as if Jesus really wants to impress us with the lengths to which this man will go in spending his wealth purely for his own benefit, his own needs, his own future. In one commentator’s words, “The rich farmer not only denies a tithed portion to the God who so magnanimously blessed him with this harvest—he also dishonors the social contract that would stand between him and his community. The poor are not considered, and the welfare of his region is of no interest to him. There is not even a hint that this massive storage undertaking was

being done to ensure that provisions would be available to all in the event of famine or drought.”

Throughout his ministry Jesus recognizes that different levels of material wealth will drop into people’s lives. That’s just the way life will be. Jesus does not teach material goods possess any kind of evil in and of themselves. Jesus warns, however, that trusting in material possessions to bring us fulfillment is a grave mistake. He warns that seeing them as OURS is totally false—they are merely a TRUST--- we have a say over what happens to them. Jesus teaches that OUR JOB, which is a sacred one, given to us by God, is to see that they flow freely out and around into the whole human community, for the benefit of all. Possessions are not evil, but when our attitudes toward them ignore the claim God and all our human brothers and sisters have upon them, they become instruments of evil.

Have you ever visited a junkyard? It’s an eye-opening experience. Tangled up and piled into heaps there’s a mass of “stuff” people worked and saved to buy. Treasures, tarnished and broken, lie tossed on the ground. This is “stuff” people lived and died for. Now they are fit only for the dump. Putting your hopes and dreams on material things leads nowhere but to the junkyard.” In Leonard Sweet’s words: “Materialism is a junk value.”

The keys to unlock treasure, to break the code on the treasure map are not located where our culture proclaims they are--- no matter how shiny they look. The world’s map provides nothing but a dead end. The world has the wrong map. I once read an article explaining the statistical probability of becoming governor of the state of Illinois is greater than that of my ever winning the state lottery. Keep that in mind the next time the lotto looks like a shiny key promising great treasure.

Jesus calls us to build up treasures in heaven.

Christ does not call us to a drab, dull existence, or a life devoid of pleasure. He IS teaching us that we WON’T find what the world calls treasure to be true treasure at all. Those treasures are like cotton candy—they look pretty, and even taste pretty good at first, but then melt in your mouth and evaporate into nothing.

Jesus DOES call us to be treasure hunters, though. Hunters of TRUE treasure, which is found in the relationships we have with God and with each other. United Methodist author and speaker Leonard Sweet lays it out for us: “True treasure hunters are not Indiana Jones, but Mother Teresa. True treasure hunters are found serving dinner down at the homeless shelter; they are found teaching illiterate adults how to read; they are found doing chores and errands for someone who is

housebound; they are found sitting with their children and talking heart to heart; they are found praying on their knees, and they are found praising on their feet.”

Sweet shares some helpful examples for us to get the “feel” of being treasure hunters after the manner of Christ. “Our riches are not possessions; our riches are treasures. What’s the difference?”

Sweet’s list:

You possess a job-----you treasure your family  
You possess a house-----you treasure your home  
You possess a bank account-----you treasure your friends  
You possess a car-----you treasure your freedom  
You possess a great wardrobe-----you treasure your health  
You possess a PDA-----you treasure your time  
You possess a heart-----you treasure love

We can all be successful treasure hunters, because we have access to the KEY: the love of God made known in Jesus Christ. Even in that adventure movie, “Romancing the Stone”, the gemstone really has little value. The true treasure turns out to be the love the couple have for each other.

Our lives are an adventure. They really are. There is danger and peril, loss, sorrow and risk. There are rewards and accomplishments. In each and every day, Jesus is calling us to be treasure hunters----- spotting the shining gems of beauty and love God has planted throughout this world. We are rich, rich people. May our hearts overflow with gratitude to God, and love and mercy to all people. In this, we will be storing up riches in heaven. Amen. Amen.

(Invite people to take cotton candy or hard candy as they leave today.)