



## CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

In the name of the loving, liberating, and life-giving God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

As some of you know, before becoming a priest, I was a lawyer and I was specializing in defending people from the IRS. In other words, I was doing the Lord's work even back then. But before I fell into that niche I did what many brand new attorneys did fresh out of law school. I took just about any case that came my way. I took dog bite cases, landlord tenant cases. I defended somebody on a DUI charge. For any fans of Fifty Shades of Grey, I had a guy who actually had a secret dungeon in his basement. If you want to know more about that one, you can join me at coffee hour and ask.

But you know, looking back, a lot of those early cases I took were actually just inter-family disputes. Brothers suing one another over the family business, custody battles over children, disputes over who should be grandma's financial guardian, and of course, the inevitable fights over the family inheritance. And if you have ever had something like that in your family or seen one up close, you know it's never about the money, right? They're about the history. They're about identity, sibling rivalries, pride, ego, unresolved resentments, all of that stuff just comes bubbling up to the surface in those moments, turning even the most simple of disputes into something that can be unbelievably complicated.

One of the famous stories we had around the office was a divorce case that actually went all the way to trial over something that was really nothing more at that point than a microwave. It became the legendary \$25,000 microwave case. And it was a nice microwave, I'm sure. I have no doubt. But it wasn't at all about the microwave. Even as their lawyer, I sometimes wanted to grab them by the collar and just say, look, I don't mind making a lot of money off this, but this is costing you a lot. Is it worth it? Is it worth what it's doing to your family, to your children? Is it worth what it's doing to you?

And I think that's what Jesus is getting at in this parable, because at the moment of truth, when the rich man talks to somebody – did you catch that? Who does he talk to? He talks to his soul because that's ultimately, perhaps, what is at stake here. When we become so consumed by the pursuit of things, of getting our fair share, being a success, getting what we think we deserve, when we pursue them at the expense of relationships, that's the moment when we start to lose

ourselves, even though we may win. And it's painful to watch, much less be a party too.

So maybe that's why this gospel hits home as it does, because it begins with just such a story. A man interrupts Jesus, demanding that He weigh in on the fight he's having with his brother over the inheritance. Okay, pause for just a moment there. Okay. This man has just come face to face with the Son of God. The Son of God. And this is all he can think of to ask. You know, will you side with me against this deal with my brother? Again, it's all-consuming. But Jesus doesn't take the bait. Rather, He doesn't settle the case. He does what I always wanted to do. He tries to knock some sense into them by telling them a parable of a man who actually did win it all and yet is penniless in all the ways that matter.

So take a look at this rich man in the parable for a moment. One of the things I first noticed was he's really not a bad guy. At least there's nothing in there that tells us that. He's not corrupt. He hasn't scammed anyone to get to the top. He's doing what many of us are trying to do. He's working hard, he's planning ahead, saving for the future, looking forward to the day when he can enjoy it all. I don't know about you, but where I come from, that's called living the dream, right? And yet Jesus calls him a fool.

And I can tell you it's not about the money. It's not about his success or his hard work. It's not about the vast profits he might have made. No, the problem's not the microwave. The problem is the wanting. The problem is the striving, the vexation, as we heard. Because it's the obsession for the thing, whatever that thing happens to be, that reveals who it is that ultimately we put our trust in. And while the parable doesn't tell us explicitly, it does give us some clues, doesn't it? Jesus says the crops have been so abundant that he will have more than he will ever need, and yet we hear no expression of gratitude. He doesn't thank God, he doesn't thank those who worked his fields. He doesn't even pause to count the blessings of his life. All the little things, countless, that happened to him to bring him to where he is right now. His health. Well, at least not until that night, but the privilege he's enjoyed, the family who raised him, the people who mentored him, the lucky breaks he undoubtedly had along the way, there's no sense of humility at all. He seems to believe it really was all about him.

And so not surprisingly, when he has success, he can only think of himself. At a time when the Jewish practice was for farmers to leave some of their crop or even the corners of their fields for the poor and for the stranger, you get no sense he has plans to share anything with anyone. And, of course, why should he? Because he thinks he earned it all and therefore owns it all. And notice as well, he only talks to himself. He seems to have no one else to reflect on or to celebrate with, and if that's not bad enough, he dies that very night and learns the hard way the warning we heard from the Ecclesiastes reading: you can't take it with you because it was never yours to begin with. In fact, the only thing that is ours,

arguably, is the ego and the vanity that fuels all of this, which when the chips are down, add up to precisely nothing. Just chasing after wind.

Jesus is inviting us to reimagine what it means to be truly rich, riches that will not come through possessions, not through success or winning, not through something on the outside going our way, but something on the inside, tapping into something we already have. And I think at some level we probably all know that, don't we? It's a lesson most of us have probably learned over our lifetime, and yet we live in this consumer culture that is constantly bombarding us with messages that say the opposite, trying to sell us all kinds of material solutions for what are very real, spiritual, and emotional needs that we all have. Buy this, we hear, so you can belong. Buy this and be part of the “in” crowd. Buy this if you want to be happy, to feel safe. Buy this to look young. To become thin, buy this. Buy this, so that you can finally, finally feel good about yourself.

And we all know, right? It's marketing 101, about the deep needs that we all have for validation, for community, for love, for acceptance, they are very real and they're very tender, and it's easy when we are at a weak moment to fall for it all over again. I know I certainly have. I think I've told this story before, how early on in my career we settled a big case and everyone got a little piece of the settlement. And to somebody who had grown up as basically a starving student his whole life, it felt like I'd won the lottery. I felt like I'd finally arrived.

So I did all the things I thought I was supposed to do. I went out and bought a really expensive Italian sports car, one that would've been owned by Phil Jackson when he was coaching the Chicago Bulls, actually. I bought a house with a view of San Diego Bay, a sailboat that I'd always had my eye on, on and on. And per our rich man, I did not give one single thought to sharing any of it. But it didn't take long for that excitement to wear off. I soon found myself looking at the next model, the car with even more horsepower. I discovered that real estate agents considered my house to have a limited bay view, which really, really bothered me. I really started looking at houses with the unlimited view, right? And when I went sailing, I couldn't help but notice there was always a bigger boat.

Psychologists call this the hedonic treadmill. The idea that we have to adapt or that we quickly adapt to whatever pleasures or luxuries that we happen to acquire, and we psychologically develop a new baseline, which means the effects wear off, and soon enough we're looking for the next big thing. And so Jesus warns us to be on guard against all of that because greed isn't about the money, it's about trying to fill. Fill that God shaped hole in all of our hearts with all the wrong things, none of which are a substitute and will only leave us feeling empty and alone in the end.

Jesus is urging us to get off the treadmill and become rich toward God. And the good news is that unlike that rich man, unlike the brothers fighting over the

inheritance, unlike many of my former clients, unlike my younger self, there is nothing more we need. We don't have to strive. We don't have to want. We don't need to fight. We don't need to win. We don't need to control it. We don't even have to earn it. The good news is that the riches toward God are already ours for the taking, given to every single one of us as a pure gift of grace. Everything we need to love and to be loved is already ours. All we need to do is to stop the striving, to stop the wanting long enough so that we can start seeing the true riches that are right in front of us.

I caught a glimpse of that, of those very riches this past week. Our girls just returned from church summer camp, which I will admit was five glorious days of peace and quiet. But I really missed them. Both of us did. So the first morning they were back. I ran upstairs to say, good morning. And I found that they had lined up all of their dolls in a big circle on the floor. And I'm like, so what's this game? And she says, well, we're playing camp. And I'm like, really? How does that go? Well, we're passing these three objects around to everyone, and that's the game. So I said, well, what are these objects? And she says, well, and Gianna loaned them to me. The first one was a small compact mirror. She said, you open it up and you can see the person Jesus made and the person Jesus loves.

And I was so touched. You know, I thought they were just doing campfire songs. And so I said, well, what's the second one? And she says, well, and she pulls out this little bracelet, and if you can't see it, it has multicolored hearts on it. And she says, they passed this one around and it is a reminder to them of all the different colors and all the diversity that God makes us with, and how there is space for everyone in the circle. And I'm like, Gianna, you're writing my sermon for me. Don't stop. What's the last one? And so she pulls out this pen light, and I'm like, what's that all about? She says, well, you pass it around and they turn it on and they can see and be reminded that each of them has the light of Jesus and can shine it when it's dark.

And there it was around this little circle of dolls. Eight-year-old kids describing the very thing that we adults sometimes too easily forget, describing the riches that can never be taken away, that can never be lost in the stock market, can never go out of style or be replaced by the next model. Riches that don't divide families. They can't pin us against one another because they are perfectly abundant. The more we give, the more we receive. The more love we share, the more love we receive.

This is the wealth that Jesus invites us all to build our lives around. It is not about the money. It's not about the microwaves or the better views. It's about the image you see in the mirror each morning. Can you see the person Jesus made? Do you see the person Jesus loves? Just as you are in all your diversity, in all your quirks, all your strangeness, all your hang-ups, and yes, in all your foolishness. And can you see yourself as Christ's light in the world? Because that is exactly what you

are, every single one of you. God doesn't love us if. God doesn't love us if we change, God doesn't love us if we say the right things or believe the right things. God doesn't love us if we come to church more often. God loves us so, so, so that we might be so filled with his love that we might share it with the world who needs it so much. God loves us so, so that each of us might be rich toward God.

Amen.