

Last week we talked about Mary and Martha. Both Daryl and I talked about how the story often rubs people, especially women, the wrong way.

But in fact the work that Martha did was important – it was the holy work of hospitality. It seemed that perhaps her distraction and stressing were the real issue.

This week, we've got the wealthy farmer whose bins aren't big enough. I always wonder how farmers hear this story. If you drive around out in our rural area, you'll see lots of big grain bins. Some of the large operations may have 4 or 5 or even more grain bins.

What's the issue with this? This man was apparently a very successful farmer. Now he's got a superabundance of grain. You've got to store that grain or it will rot on the ground.

The issue isn't with the storage bins per se. The issue is that the man is storing up his grain only for himself, so he can enjoy life without worry.

But then he dies. And as the saying goes, he who dies with the most money, still dies.

So the reading is not so much about grain bins. It's about greed and the paradoxical notion that wealth can actually make people more anxious about having enough.

God cares a great deal about our relationship to money.

There are over 2300 references to wealth and possessions in scripture...160 specifically to greed. To compare, that's more than double the number of times heaven or eternal life is mentioned.

Spoiler alert – rich people who don't care for the poor don't come out well in the biblical story.

For those of us whose financial circumstances are quite comfortable, today's passage should be a little unsettling.

There's a video on YouTube called First World Problems. It's a series of vignettes with some very tearful Americans. Here's a sampling of their words:

I'm freezing! Someone turned the heat down to 72.

I'm starving and we don't have anything except leftovers.

My new iPhone is too big for my skinny jeans.

The struggle is real, folks.

But there's another video put out by an organization called Water is Life that works for ways to provide fresh water to people in developing countries.

In this video, there is also a series of vignettes of first world problems. Only now the speakers are in Africa.

Imagine a child in front of a small wooden house in a dusty yard with a few banana trees. He says "I hate when my car seats aren't heated."

Another is a young girl in front of a small mud house who says "I hate when my phone charger won't reach my bed."

The videos are meant to poke a little fun. But they also make a serious point about the disparity of wealth in the world.

Now, I know that we in our country have legitimate things to be anxious about. We have loved ones who are sick or dying. We are anxious for our kids' or grandkids' futures. We worry about climate change. We're anxious about the political situation.

But this passage really is about the worry of not having enough materially. So, I'm going to stick with that this morning.

Now, some of you are probably thinking, OK, Jesus said not to worry – if God tends to the ravens and the lilies, God will take care of you.

But even here in one of the richest countries in the world, there are people who don't have enough – we don't have to go to Africa to find people who can never seem to climb out of the hole of poverty.

So what's up with that?

Let's start with the premise that God truly is a generous God who has given abundantly. Let's assume that God truly has blessed the world with enough for everyone to live. That seems most consistent with what we know about our God, do we agree?

If God is faithful and generous, but there are people who struggle to put food on their table, families who are one car breakdown or serious illness from homelessness, people who are literally dying due to poverty, then we have to conclude something else has gone awry.

I believe this story would have us conclude that the problem is the guy whose answer to the abundance he's been given is to build bigger bins for himself.

As I've said a million times, when Jesus preaches about the kingdom of God, he's not talking about going to heaven when we die.

He's talking about a way of living that ensures all have what they need. We live in a much more complex society today, but it is still true that when there are people who have too much, there are others who will have too little.

And the question always becomes, well how much is enough and how much is too much? For some, a million dollars still isn't enough to stave off the nagging worry that we'll have to lower our standard of living in retirement.

And for a privileged few, even billions of dollars doesn't seem to be enough to keep them from rigging the system so they can get even more.

At its heart, greed is idolatry. When the heart is focused on stock portfolios and bank accounts and investment accounts, what we worship is probably not God.

There is a popular theology that is often called the Prosperity Gospel.

What Jesus said here in this passage is that if you seek first the kingdom of God, all the things you need will be given to you.

The prosperity gospel takes that and says, if you seek the kingdom by giving generously – usually to the preacher's own ministry – God will ensure you will have wealth and success...not just what you need.

It's a way of taking the gospel and turning it just a quarter turn off plumb...and it becomes false.

So what does Jesus mean? Sell all our possessions and give alms to the poor? I mean, Jesus says it right there.

Maybe. Some Christians have definitely interpreted it that way and have done just that.

But it probably wouldn't really actually work all that well if everyone did that.

I've been emphasizing Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God really my whole career.

The kingdom of God is a way of life that begins now through Jesus' followers – it's a bit of heaven brought into the present.

It's a way of life where people love one another, care for the poor and the sick and the outcast. It's a new way of living in community to make sure that all have the clothes they need, enough food to eat, a safe place to live.

It's a way of life built on trust in God's loving care and provision. Anxiety and worry are not really compatible with life in the kingdom.

Anxiety and fear prevent us from seeing what God has done and is doing. We grasp at more and more things and money and those who don't have the power to grasp more lose out.

Anxiety about having enough keeps us from the sort of generosity our world needs – generosity not just as charity, but as a willingness to live a different way.

It prevents us from accepting things that make life better for one group if we're worried it will take even a little of what we deem ours.

In the end, everything is God's. Everything we have comes from God. God gives generously with the intention that all will have what they need. Desperately grasping to keep what's mine is not the Jesus Way of life.

The good news here is that we can ease up. God doesn't provide so that a few may have too much and others not near enough. But God does provide enough for everyone. In the world.

For people who are poor, this should be genuine good news. The kingdom of God is a world where you don't starve or lose your home or get your water shut off. It's a community where everyone pitches in to prevent that.

Some of us may not hear that as great news. We worry about what we might have to give up.

But the promise is here in the passage. If God cares about the ravens and the lilies, God cares about us. God cares about those who don't have enough. God cares that we too often worry about not having enough, even when we have a lot.

Jesus assures us that we can step out in trust, ease up, be more generous, be more willing to create a society in which all can thrive. In short, Jesus invites us to seek a life in God's new world...in the kingdom of God. To be willing to lose one life for the sake of new life.

And to trust...however haltingly...that falling into the Jesus way of life is the answer to our collective anxiety.