

On Guard Against Greed
Luke 12:13-21

Let us turn to our Scripture passage this morning,

Which comes to us from Luke 12:13-21.

Hear the Word of the Lord from the book that we love:

Someone in the crowd said to him,

“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.”

He said to him,

“Friend,

Who set me to be the judge or arbitrator over you?”

Then he said to them,

“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed;

For life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

Then he told them a parable.

The land of a rich man produced abundantly.

So he thought to himself,

“What should I do? For I don’t have space to store my crops.”

Then he said, “This is what I will do,

I will pull down my barns and build larger ones,

There I will store my grain and my goods.

Then I will say to my soul,

“Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years;

Relax, eat, drink, and be merry.”

But God said to him,

“You fool! Tonight your life will be demanded of you.

And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

So it is for those who store up treasure for themselves

But are not rich toward God.

This is the Word of the Lord,

Thanks be to God.

Did you notice the only people the man in the parable talked about?

His three favorite people.

Me, myself, and I.

"What should I do?"

"I have no place to store MY crops."

"I will do this, I will pull down MY barns, and there I will store MY grain and MY crops."

Me, me, me.

My, my, my.

I, I, I.

All of his self-absorption, self-interest, and self-centeredness,

Brings him to a place where God calls him a fool

For storing up treasures for himself,

And not being "rich toward God."

His story doesn't end well,

And Eustace Scrubb's story seems to be heading down the same tracks.

"There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.

His parents called him Eustace Clarence and masters called him Scrubb.

I can't tell you how his friends spoke to him, for he had none.

He didn't call his Father and Mother 'Father' and 'Mother' but Harold and Alberta.

Eustace Clarence disliked his cousins,

The four Pevensies, Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy.

But he was quite glad when he heard that Edmund and Lucy were coming to stay.

For deep down inside him he liked bossing and bullying;

And, though he was a puny little person who couldn't have stood up even to Lucy,

Let alone Edmund, in a fight,

He knew that there were dozens of ways to give people a bad time

If you are in your own home and they are only visitors."

Suddenly, as they are sitting in the living room,

Lucy, Edmund, and Eustace are taken into the magical land of Narnia,

On the boat of Prince Caspian, the Dawn Treader.

Eustace complains about the food and drink on the ship,

about the teetering and tottering of the boat,

saying a motor boat or a cruise liner would be more impressive.

As they continue on their adventure,

The Dawn Treader is nearly capsized by a treacherous storm.

Right before it sinks,

They find what appears to be a deserted island,

and bring the boat to shore to make repairs.

Instead of helping the others repair the boat,

Eustace sneaks away,

And stumbles upon a dead dragon's treasure.

"They don't have any tax here," he said,

"And you don't have to give any treasure to the government."

“I wonder how much I can carry? That bracelet now—those things in it are probably diamonds—
I’ll slip that on my own wrist.

Too big, but not if I push it up above my elbow.

Then fill my pockets with diamonds.

After searching through his loot,

He was exhausted from his walk through the mountains,

And he fell asleep.

When he woke up, the bracelet on his arm felt very tight.

Something was not right.

He rushed outside to a pool of water,

He looked and what he saw in the pool of water was a dragon face.

He had turned into a dragon while he was asleep!

Sleeping on a dragon’s hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart,

He had become a dragon himself.

But the moment he realized he was a dragon,

He didn’t want to be one anymore!

He wanted to be friends.

He wanted to get back among humans and talk and laugh and share things.

An appalling loneliness came over him.

He began to see that others had not really been enemies at all.

He longed for the voices of his cousins.

Eustace the dragon wept.

He went back to the boat and tried to talk to the others,

But all that came out of his mouth were dragon noises.

Eustace tried to get onto the boat with the others,

But he was too big.

The boat began to sink,

His tail hit Lucy,

His claws dug into the boat.

Eustace realized he was a nuisance,

So he left the others and the boat.

6 days later,

Edmund got up early one morning because he thought he heard something moving.

He came down softly to the edge of the wood,

And there was a dark figure there.

"Is that you, Edmund?"

The dark figure said.

"Yes. Who are you?" he said.

"Don't you know me?" It's me! Eustace.

They sat down together.

"I want to tell you how I stopped being a dragon," He said.

"I was lying awake and wondering what on earth would become of me,

I looked up,

And saw the very last thing I expected: a huge lion coming slowly toward me.

It came nearer and nearer and I was terribly afraid.

It told me to follow him,

And it led me a long way into the mountains.

And there was always this moonlight

Over and round the lion wherever we went.

So at last we came to the top of a mountain I'd never seen before,

And there was a garden—trees and fruit and everything.

In the middle of it there was a lake.

I must undress you,

The lion said.

But I didn't have any clothes on.

Oh, he must be talking about my scales,

So I started scratching myself and my scales began coming off all over the places.

And then I scratched a little deeper and, instead of just scales coming off here and there,

My whole skin started peeling off beautifully,

Like I was a banana.

But I couldn't get all the scales off.

Each time I scratched, there was another layer.

Then the lion said—"you have to let me undress you."

I was afraid of his claws, but I was pretty nearly desperate now.

So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it.

The first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone into my heart.

And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt.

The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of peeling the stuff off.

You know—if you ever picked the scab of a sore place.

I know exactly what you mean, said Edmund.

Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off—

just as I thought I'd done it myself the three times,

only they hadn't hurt—

and there it was lying on the grass:

only ever so much thicker, and darker, and more knobbly looking
than the others had been.

And there was I as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been.

Then he caught hold of me—and threw me into the water.

I started swimming and splashing around deliciously in the water,

I found that all the pain had gone.

I'd turned into a boy again.

Then, the Lion dressed me in new clothes. (pause)

It would be nice, and fairly nearly true,

To say that 'from that time forth Eustace was a different boy.'

To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy.

He had relapses.

There were still many days when he could be very tiresome.

But the cure had begun.

When they were attacked at sea,

Eustace threw himself in front of a great big sea monster,

To protect Lucy.

He wasn't perfect,

But the cure had begun.

Do you have dragon scales on your heart

From years of putting yourself before others,

Your career before your family,

Your money, possessions, and security before anything or anyone else?

Do you have dragon scales on your heart?

I know my dragon scales can get thick from time to time.

I wonder if Jesus,

Like the lion,

Doesn't want to tear off our dragon scales,

And make us new children;

New boys and girls.

Children who splash and play,

Children who are not ruled by their possessions,

But rule over their possessions,

And can freely give of their money,

Freely offer their time,

And Freely give away their resources.

I wonder if being rich toward God means

Having our favorite people be our neighbors,

And not me myself and I.

With God's help, we can move from greed toward generosity,

from having our possessions rule us toward ruling over our possessions,

from trying to preserve our lives to giving them away and truly finding them,

from storing up treasures for ourselves, toward being rich toward God.

This is a painful road,

A difficult road,

but it's the road toward freedom and true life.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.