



LESSONS IN LIVING

“Pure Gift”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Rev. Erica Knisely
June 29, 2025

Scripture Reading: **Luke 12:13-31**

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to give me my share of our inheritance.” Jesus replied, “Friend, who has set me up as your judge or arbiter?” Then he told the crowd, “Avoid greed in all its forms. Your life isn’t made more secure by what you own—even when you have more than you need.” Jesus then told them a parable in these words: “There was a rich farmer who had a good harvest. ‘What will I do?’ the farmer mused. ‘I have no place to store my harvest. I know! I’ll pull down my grain bins and build larger ones. All my grain and goods will go there. Then I’ll say to myself: You have blessings in reserve for many years to come. Relax! Eat, drink and be merry!’

But God said to the farmer, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be required of you. To whom will all your accumulated wealth go?’ This is the way it works with people who accumulate riches for themselves, but are not rich in God.”

Then he said to the disciples, “That’s why I tell you, don’t worry about your life and what you are to eat. Don’t worry about your body and what you are to wear. For life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Take a lesson from the ravens.

They don’t sow or reap. They have neither a food cellar nor a barn, yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable are you than birds? Can any of you, for all your worrying, add a single hour to your life? If even the smallest things are beyond your control, why worry about all the rest? Notice how the flowers grow. They neither labor nor weave, yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was robed like one of these! If that is how God clothes the grass in the field - which is here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow - how much more will God look after you! You have so little faith! As for you, don’t set your hearts on what you’ll eat or what you’ll drink.

Stop worrying! All the nations of the world seek these things, yet your God well knows what you need. Set your sights on the kindom of God, and all these other things will be given to you as well.*

*The word ‘kindom’, often used by mujerista theologian Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz, replaces ‘kingdom’ because it represents an egalitarian realm and emphasizes our familial relationship with each other.

Sermon

Have you ever been worried, anxious, and someone tells you, *"Don't worry."* What good does that do? Does that work? No. Imagine a grandmother who is raising her grandkids, about to have her electricity turned off before a cold snap, calls and says, *"I'm worried,"* we wouldn't say, *"Don't worry."* Or a dad who is trying to get a stable place, income, rent, in a nice place for him and his teenage son after tragic loss and setback after setback, and says, *"I'm worried."* We wouldn't say, *"Don't worry."* Or the person on Social Security who relies on that completely for their food, their medical bills, their electricity, said, *"I'm worried that maybe one of these months, the money is not going to be in the bank."* We wouldn't say, *"Don't worry."* Confession. I said that to my mom, who is that person who relies on social security, worried about her worrying and what that was going to do to her health. *"Don't worry. Don't worry. It's going to be fine."* It's true. I think anyone who is in a caring profession, pastors, counselors, forget all of their skills when it comes to their family. I don't know how each one of you is feeling right now.

There's a lot of us in this room. We all might be in different places. Maybe you're worried and anxious. Maybe you're grieving. Maybe you're angry. Maybe you're content and okay. Maybe there are good things happening that you're happy and excited about.

In terms of how I'm feeling, 'worried' isn't really the word. I'm okay, but I feel a little muddled. I feel a little deflated, if I'm being honest. There's so much going on that's frankly horrifying. People, law enforcement, showing up in masks and just whisking brown-skinned people off the streets or setting off explosives in front of their house to send drones in or picking up people who've lived here for decades in their front lawn while they're gardening. Trans folks being scapegoated every which way you look. Bombs dropped on Iran. Maybe solidifying that countries aim in making a nuclear weapon. Women in emergency rooms, not able to get life-saving care that they need. Programs defunded that are trying to address the high maternal mortality rates of African-American women. Education defunded. Oh, yeah, and there's the warming climate. All of these different things making us look in all of these different directions, what are we supposed to focus on when we care about every single thing that's happening?

And what do we do about it all? I don't really know what does fighting the good fight look like right now? Call the Senator. Add my name to this letter. Show up in clergy as higher at a press conference. Hold this sign. All of those are good things, right? Continue to do those things, but they just feel inadequate. I feel a little deflated. I find myself waiting, watching for the movement, or the person, or the thing that's going to galvanize all of us into making real change. At the same time, life is happening, right? We get sick, sometimes really sick. We're schlepping our kids off to summer camps. We're going to appointments. We're doing the dishes that are never done. The dog is looking at us with those sweet brown eyes, wanting a walk. All of these things, life happening, all of these things. It feels like it can just sort of press in. I find myself curling inward. Am I okay? Okay. Is Patrick okay? Is my son okay? Okay, we're okay. But what about soon? We'll have food, right? I'll have the health care I need to be able to move. I think his school is going to be okay for a while.

We have this instinct, all of us, especially in times of threat for self-preservation, all right? I mean, it's normal. It's our job to look after ourselves and especially our families. We want good things. We want enough, and not just enough, but good things for ourselves, for our loved ones. We want to maintain what we've got, at least maintain it, because maybe soon we won't have enough. Here's Jesus saying, *"Don't worry that someday there might not be enough."* Do you believe that there will be enough, always? Do I? Because right now, there's not enough for millions, billions of people.

But I think to hear this, "Don't worry." Clearly, we have to look at what comes before that and then what comes after that in this text. The story starts with Jesus in a crowd, and this young man is like, listen, I need you, rabbi. I need you to give a ruling to tell my older brother to give me what's mine, what's due to me, my inheritance. Jesus said, I'm not your arbiter or judge. Beware of greed. And then Jesus tells a parable about a rich person who brings an abundance from the land. And this person says to himself, look at all my fruits. Look at all my grains and goods. I can't even store all these. I have to tear down these storehouses and build huge barns and very satisfied with himself. Look at all you have. You're going to be fine for years to come, so relax, eat, drink, be merry. And then in irony, God says, well, your time's up. So what did you do? Why did you stir up earthly treasures for yourselves but not be rich toward God. Then Jesus turns not to that young man that asked the question, but to the disciples and said, do not worry. Do not worry what you will eat or what you will drink. Life is more than an abundance of possessions. Look at the ravens. They don't store or seep or reap, but yet they have the food they need. Look at the lilies of the fields, not even the richest, wisest person was clothed like one of these. Doesn't God care for you even more than these? Do not be like the nations that crave after these things, seeking and seeking more and more and more. But seek after God's kingdom, be rich toward God. Sell your possessions, give your money, then you will build something that lasts, something that won't fail you.

Can we live in such a way to see everything in life as pure gift? The land, the soil, the water. Because in truth, there is actually enough for everybody. The Earth isn't an Earth of scarcity, but of abundance. Do we know that the fruits produced by our labor aren't our fruits, my fruits, your fruits, your grains, my grains, your grains, your inheritance, my inheritance, but a gift to be shared? And do we believe it's possible to live in a world where to cut off a grandmother's electricity before a cold spell would be incomprehensible, where every elder doesn't have to worry about if they're going to have food to eat or clothing to wear because they wouldn't have to wonder. It would just be. Is that our vision? Because a very different vision, a very different vision of the world is trying to close in around us. It's trying to make us feel numb or confused, protective or small. We are the richest, poorest nation on Earth. If this budget reconciliation bill, the Congress is considering right now, passes, the rich are going to become richer and the poor are going to become poorer.

This bill cuts food assistance for 11 million, Medicaid for over 11 million people, including people with disabilities, including elders. 60% of the people in nursing homes rely on Medicaid for their care. It cuts federal Pell grants for low-income students to help them afford college. Debating right now, but the original version included provisions to sell off public lands to private investors. And it increases spending for ICE. Billions, billions for ICE. The budget doesn't cut Social Security, not now. Did you know that 42% of people nearing retirement age have nothing

saved? We are the richest, poorest nation on Earth. A quarter of our children live in poverty. 36.8 million people below the poverty line, which isn't even talking about all the people who can't make ends meet, right? And I know I'm really just telling you things that you already know. We are the richest, poorest nation on Earth. And this budget reconciliation bill will give \$12,000 to the richest income bracket and take \$1,600 from the lowest income bracket. I think about arguments that the richest people who are going to be saving that money in taxes, well, they earned that money, right? That's just their money.

They get to keep more of their money, and we're just going to stop giving charity to the poorest folks. Whose labor produced their profit? Whose land? Whose resources? God says it's all gift. All gift. God's land, God's resources, God's people. We live in an abundant, verdant world where there is enough for everyone. But not when people hoard it. Not when people keep the best lands for themselves. Not when CEOs and shareholders are swimming in profits and just giving drops to all the people who made it possible. Not when people mine and deforest and dump their profits' waste in the land. Not when people keep on craving and striving for more and more and more.

And this is the heart of the problem. The reality is that so many in power are trying to obscure by scapegoating trans siblings and immigrants. The struggle isn't between left and right. I don't even think it's between woke and MAGA. I think the struggle is between a world where everybody has plenty and most don't have enough. No longer can we put our faith in progress, though a lot of progress has been made. No longer can we even put our faith in the common decency and civility of our leaders, though most people are very decent.

No longer can we even put our faith in the rule of law, though for now, the dam seems to be holding. So what's left? We have a vision. We have a dream. We have a promise. If we're brave enough to believe it, a promise that when we seek the good of all, all people, all the time, that we will all have enough. Maybe Jesus saying, *"Don't worry,"* isn't so much bad pastoral care to people who are struggling, but a call to those of us who are comfortable. A call to be in solidarity with the millions and billions of people who are struggling. A call to listen, a call to share freely, a call to labor alongside them toward this vision. I don't think now is the time to be small, but to dream bigger, to double down on the dream. Every Sunday at the end of our services, we sing

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"This is the time... You are the people... We are the people that we've been waiting for."

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kU4_nS2YDLk

Let America Be America Again

By Langston Hughes (1901-1967)

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!
Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.

I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—
Hungry yet today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!
I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,

Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
That's made America the land it has become.
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
In search of what I meant to be my home—
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay?
For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay—
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—
The land that never has been yet—
And yet must be—the land where every man is free.
The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME—
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
We must take back our land again,
America!

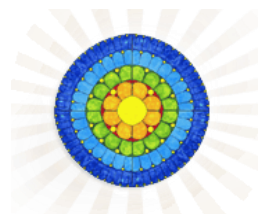
O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!
Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,

We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain—
All, all the stretch of these great green states—
And make America again!

Benediction

Friends, we might feel inadequate to these times. We might feel a little deflated, but we carry a beautiful dream in our hearts. We have these hands, and we have these feet, and we have one another to carry this dream out into the world. So go with love in your heart, with courage in your mind, and with peace surrounding you into this beautiful world where there is truly enough for everyone. Amen.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.



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