



Claim the Jackpot!

Pastor John Klawiter

July 31, 2022

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 12:13-21

Grace and peace to you my siblings in Christ,

On Friday night, the MegaMillions lottery jackpot was over \$1 billion dollars.

With a “B”. Billion.

For \$2, anyone over 18 who bought a ticket had the same odds of getting handed a check for \$1 BILLION dollars.

Can you even imagine? Someone bought the winning ticket in Illinois.

It doesn't matter how hard you've worked or who you know, it's a game of random chance. What would YOU do with \$1 billion... or \$500 million after the lump sum and taxes?

What advice would Jesus have on how to lavishly spend those millions?

¹⁵And Jesus said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

If we think a large lottery victory would bring happiness and self-satisfaction, Jesus suggests otherwise.

It's a story Jesus tells that's about more than just the money. It's a story about what money does to us. This guy's biggest issue is his hoarding of assets. He's storing up everything and hurting his neighbors in the process for his own gain.

It's ok to have possessions, money, assets... but how we use them, share them, and spend them IS a reflection of our Christian identity.

In the last few years, we can relate, can't we? Toilet paper, bread, baby formula... any time there was hints of supply chain problems, we see empty shelves. It's strange. It's not what we're used to in this country.

If **you're reading today's passage in your Bible**, it might feel like an isolated story. Oftentimes, there's a passage that lasts about 10 verses, then a heading that makes you believe that the story is moving another direction.



In Luke chapter 12, it feels like that's the case... but the story right after this is an answer to the parable about the rich fool.

It's called **"Do Not Worry"** and Jesus says "Therefore." He clearly is referencing what he just said, otherwise, what is the therefore there for? Know what I mean?

Those storing up treasures for themselves aren't rich towards God, **THEREFORE**, don't worry about your life, what you'll eat, what you'll wear.

Worrying doesn't add an hour to our lives. Worrying doesn't make us financially rich. It certainly doesn't make us spiritually rich—and rich towards God.

Worry keeps us from thinking we have enough. Worry makes us hoard things, store things, **NOT** share things. Worry keeps us from trusting what God is up to and tempts us into selfish decision-making.

Lynne Twist had a great example of that in her book the Soul of Money.

Twist told stories about her life as a fundraiser and gave one particular example early in her career when she was working for the Hunger Project.

She had a meeting lined up with the CEO of a huge food company in Chicago that had just suffered a bad PR nightmare. The company felt that a donation to the Hunger Project would help its image.

Twist was quickly ushered into the CEO's office and gave a brief, but passionate plea about the mission of her organization.

The CEO opened his desk and pulled out a pre-printed check for \$50,000. No matter what she said, it wasn't going to affect the amount. Twist knew she had to take the check and then get out.

Twist put the check in her briefcase and, despite the large donation, something felt very awkward about the transaction. Twist felt like she was receiving more than just money. With it, came the guilt and shame of the company trying to pay its way out of disgrace.

Later that day, she did another fundraiser in a Harlem church basement where she gave the same pitch, and probably raised \$500, but everyone in the room bought into the mission and was willing to do whatever they could to support the cause.

One of the women who heard her pitch that night, Gertrude, gave Twist \$50 and a big hug. Then, she said **"Money is like water. For some folks, it rushes through life like a raging river. Money comes through my life like a little trickle. But I want to pass it on in a way that does the most good for the most folks."**



Twist got home and then next morning, she mailed the check for \$50,000 BACK to the CEO and wrote him a letter suggesting they chose an organization they felt committed to. Her own livelihood depended on this donation and she gave it back.

Years later, this CEO would reach out to her again. He was retired and had received a significant exit package for his work.

This time, the retired CEO wrote a letter. He said the interaction between them years ago stuck with him because of her response. He said that her returning the money and including the letter stood out as a moment when all the rules of corporate America were broken.

The CEO wrote that, now, he wanted to make a difference to end world hunger. He included a check, this time from his own pocket, many times in excess of the \$50,000 originally returned.

Twist realized the power of money when it was filled with purpose, integrity, and aligned with our soul.

“No matter how much or how little money you have flowing through your life, when you direct that flow with soulful purpose, you feel wealthy.

You feel vibrant and alive when you use your money in a way that represents you, not just as a response to the market economy, but also as an expression of who you are. When you let your money move to things you care about, your life lights up. That’s really what money is for.”

A few years ago, Chuck Tollesfrud gave our congregation a gift from the depths of his soul. \$100,000 to help the hungry, the homeless, the veteran. Chuck moved his money to things he cared about.

Faith Lutheran went on a journey. We explored the idea of putting Tiny Houses on our land and voted to move forward with that process in January 2020. Our congregation lit up. We were curious. Excited. Relevant.

Then, Covid hit.

Faith continues to walk forward into the hope of helping our unsheltered neighbors, but the vision shifted. We are doing many things in our community, but the Sacred Settlement here at Faith is not imminent.

However, we learned a lot. We shared what we learned.

Others have jumped in and said yes because of the path we helped pave.



A small congregation of 20 families in Saint Paul, Mosaic Christian Community, said “yes, we can do this.” And they did.

Churches across the metro sponsored each of the houses for our unsheltered neighbors to call home. Faith sponsored and helped build a home for David, a veteran.

Talking about money... a few years ago, Mosaic was in the red. They couldn't afford to build houses. They couldn't afford to re-do their land and create a community space in their church.

Gabrielle Clowdus, the founder and co-leader of Settled, showed me around the Sacred Settlement this week. The houses are nearly completed and residents will be moving in very soon. How did they do it? Not on their own.

She told me about entering the home of a woman who wanted to help support this work. She lived in a modest house, but handed Gabrielle a check. It was enough money that this woman could have built herself a new beautiful home. And she was giving it away. She wanted to see the Sacred Settlement dream fulfilled.

Mosaic is now thriving. This small church is welcoming new families that believe in the mission God has called this church to follow. Financially, they're in the black and making renovations to their building that they couldn't have imagined doing before.

What does that tell me about our church? In this awkward time of post-pandemic and shifting spiritual needs. What will happen? God tells us not to worry. Instead, listen.

Where do we see the biggest needs in our community? How can Faith faithfully respond in a way that makes a difference? What might we learn from our conversations on National Night Out this Tuesday?

This morning, we had the gift of witnessing Crew washed in the waters of baptism. It reminds us of the gift we've already won.

What's the prize? A lifetime of community focused on God's faithfulness. Countless stories of grace we can draw from our memory bank whenever we lose our sense of worth and purpose. And an optimistic promise of hope.

Remember what Gertrude wanted? She believed that whatever she could share, she wanted it to do the most good for the most folks.

It's not about **what** we have. It's about “whose” we have. Everything we have is God's. We are stewards of God's kingdom. It's a tremendous prize, and a tremendous responsibility.



Every day, claim that jackpot. Claim God's unconditional love. Know that you are worthy of it... know that you are called to give it away. Amen