

Charley Reeb:

Well, good morning. Welcome to worship, remote worship, online worship for Johns Creek United Methodist Church. I'm Pastor Charley Reeb, and it's an honor and privilege to be able to connect with you in this way, so thank you for joining us.

Before I begin my prayer and message, I have a very exciting announcement for you. Perhaps you've already heard this on social media, but our reopening taskforce met. As we planned and prayed and deliberated about how to reopen given these circumstances and the safest way to do that, because I know we're all chomping at the bit to connect as a community of faith again, well, we've decided that we will begin reopening for worship August 2nd for outside worship. Now, more information will be given to you very soon, more details about this, but we feel the safest way forward right now is to have worship outside.

Once again, your taskforce has done a great job planning for that and talking about that, making decisions. It's going to be a new and novel and exciting way to worship as we begin, but, once again, I can gladly tell you that, August 2nd, we'll start outside worship. We'll give it a shot and see how it goes. Be on the lookout for more information in your email inbox very soon. All right. Let's have a word of prayer. Let's pray.

Lord, we do thank you for this time together to worship you as all of us gather in our own way to connect with you, to seek guidance from you, to seek your wisdom and power and also to connect with loved ones. Perhaps, we're in a living room or maybe we are outside on our devices watching this. However, we're connected, Lord, we know we're connected to each other and to you, and now, Lord, you've given me the amazing privilege and responsibility of preaching your word to these, my friends and your servants. I ask you, Lord, to speak to me and through me in such a way that all of us receive a word from you that will make a difference to our lives. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Imagine a funeral. Everyone's gathered here in the sanctuary. The organ is playing. There are a bunch of flowers, and everyone's gathered together here in the sanctuary. A reception has been prepared and the gathering room. The minister walks the family in, and everybody stands. Then the music stops, and the minister gets up to speak.

Now, imagine this is your funeral. That's right, your funeral. What are they saying about you? What is the minister saying about you? What are your family and friends saying about you? How are you being remembered? Now, imagine the reception. Punch and cookies and sandwiches are all displayed, and everybody is walking around eating potato salad talking about you. What are they saying about you? What do you want them to say about you? What is your legacy? Maybe the key question here is are you living your life in such a way now that reflects how you want to be remembered? I'll tell you, that exercise certainly snaps things into perspective quickly, doesn't it?

One of the benefits of being a pastor is I get to deal with death on a regular basis. Now, you may be wondering, Charley, is that really a benefit? I believe it is because, when you deal with death and dying on a regular basis, you find out real quick quite often how precious life really is and what's important and what's not important, what you should be focused on and what you should not be focused on. It's hard for you not to learn those lessons when you deal with death and dying and you do funerals quite a lot.

I recall, in another church I served many years ago, I would often help out the local funeral home doing funerals for people who did not have a pastor. What was said quite often is I would often find not only did some folks not have a pastor, but they would hardly have any family or friends to speak of. I recall one person in particular who passed away, and they asked me, the funeral home asked me, to do a service for them, and I went to the funeral home to meet with any neighbors or friends who

remembered this person perhaps. I got there, and there were just two or three neighbors, that was it, and so I said, "Could you tell me a little bit about this person so I can plan the service?"

They looked at each other awkward and said, "Well, to be honest, pastor, he really didn't talk to many people in the neighborhood. He kept to himself." I said, "Isn't there anything you can tell me?" and one said, "Well, we do remember that he loved this red Corvette. He had a red Corvette, and he would wash it once a week. Every week, he'd wash that red Corvette, and he would sometimes wave at us," and I said, "That's it? He said, "Yeah, that's it, pastor. We know you'll do a great job. Thanks for doing this service."

Now, today, I want to focus on a parable that Jesus told about a man who totally missed the point of his life. He thought he had figured out his life. He thought that he had figured everything out, but he got to the end of his life, and he totally missed the point of his life. I want to focus on that today because I don't want any of us to forget why God put us here on this earth and what's the point of our lives. I want you to listen closely for the next few minutes because I believe, for many people, this could be a game changer. This could totally change the direction of your life.

Now, let me set up this parable that Jesus told by telling you the context of it. Jesus told it in the middle really of giving a sermon. He was talking to a large group of people about the Holy Spirit when, all of a sudden, a man interrupted Jesus and said, "Jesus, excuse me, could you tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me?" Can you imagine that? Here was Jesus waxing poetic about the Holy Spirit when, all of a sudden, a man says, "Jesus, thank you for all this. It's really wonderful and really great. I appreciate your words, but would you tell my brother to give me my money, my family money, my inheritance?" Now, that says everything about this man, doesn't it? He was completely obsessed with money and getting his inheritance.

Some things never change. People have been fighting about family money for ages. In fact, I will tell you, as a pastor, I have had the unfortunate experience of being caught in the middle of such disputes, but Jesus was wise. He wasn't going to be caught in the middle, and he basically said, "Am I a judge? Am I a lawyer? That's not my job. You go find a judge and you go find a lawyer and you work that out yourself." Jesus knew the man had problem with greed because then he turned to the crowd and said one of the wisest things I believe Jesus said, verse 15 of Luke 12. Jesus said, "Take care. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

Now, let me tell you, when Jesus begins a sentence with "take care", we better pay attention. Now, we all have scripture we've memorized like the Golden Rule and the greatest commandment, but there is a phrase in this particular verse that I believe we need to commit to memory as well, and it is this. When Jesus says, listen closely, "One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Say that with me where you are. One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. We need to hear this because our culture tells us the exact opposite. Every day we're bombarded by messages that tell us that, no, what we have and what we own determines who we are. Honestly, we all struggle with it as advertisements bombard us.

I mean, honestly, recently, I bought, I got a brand new set of TaylorMade Golf clubs. Now, it was time for me. My old clubs are about 10 years old. When I swung my old three-wood recently and the shaft broke apart, I realized I probably need to get new clubs. I love these things. They're wonderful. They hit the ball straight when I swing correctly. They feel great. The technology is great, but you know what? It wasn't a month after I bought these clubs that I began to see advertisements of newer clubs from other brands. I began to talk to other golfer friends who had what I thought might be better clubs, and I'm thinking, "Wait a second, Charley, you just bought these clubs. There's nothing wrong with them," and yet I was lured by the new. I was lured by supposedly more, and that's the materialism trap, isn't it, that

unless we have more, unless we have what's new, we'll never be satisfied. It's like drinking salt water. The more we drink, the thirstier we get.

That's why Jesus said one's life does not consist in the abundance of possession. After Jesus makes this very wise and great statement, he then tells a parable about a man who had a great harvest, whose land produced a huge harvest, and he was all excited, but you'll notice that Jesus was very particular as he began this parable. He began it by saying, "The land of a rich man produced abundantly." He did not say, "A man produced abundantly." Yet, throughout the parable, you're going to see the man kept referring to, "My crops. My crops. My crops," perpetuating the myth of a self-made person. He forgot the source of his blessings and the source of his resources. He thought he was the only reason for his success, and that is a great myth, and I will tell you that, as sure as I stand here, there is no such thing as a self-made person, no such thing despite what we hear in our American culture.

When people often say, "Well, Charley, I did it all myself. I never had any help. I did it all myself," I often say to them, "Oh, yeah, is that right? Let me ask you some questions. Who gave you life? Who brought you into this world? Who paid taxes so you could go to school? Who farmed the food that you ate throughout your life? Who gave you medicine when you were sick? Who gave you skill? Who gave you talent? Who gave you resources?"

Think about that on this July 4th weekend, as we celebrate our freedom, it's a wonderful thing, and we should, rightly so, but as we celebrate our freedom, let's not forget to celebrate our opportunities to exercise our freedom that the military and soldiers have fought so we can have freedom. As we live our lives, let us remember the people behind us who have given us opportunity and, ultimately, God Almighty, who gives us the ultimate freedom to exercise our freedom and to have opportunity.

I like the old saying, "When you walk along a fence post and you see a turtle on top of a fence post, you know that turtle did not get there by itself. I remember this whenever I watch the Oscars. You see these actors get up and they give their acceptance speeches. Do you ever hear any one of them ever say, "You know what? I just want to thank myself. I did it all." No. Even these people who are known to be self-centered have a laundry list of people they thank. "I want to thank my agent. I want to thank my producer. I want to thank my editor. I want to thank my agent. I want to thank my fans. I want to thank my family," and if they're smart, they say, "I want to thank my God."

You know what? The man of the parable totally lost sight of this. He forgot who put him on top of that fence post. He forgot it was God who gave him the seeds and the rain and the land to produce that great harvest. I tell you, when we lose sight of the source of our blessings and the reason for our blessings and who has helped us, self-centeredness often creeps into our life and leads to spiritual pain and emptiness.

I want you to notice something. I want to go to verses 17 through 19 of Luke 12, and I want you to notice as I read these three verses how often you see the word "I" and "my", how often the farmer says, "I," and, "My," verses 17 through 19. He thought to himself, "What should I do for I have no place to store all my crops?" Then he said, 'I will do this. I will pull down my barns and build larger ones and, there, I will store all my grain and my goods, and I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample good laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink and be merry.'"

Did you notice? I noticed. I counted, let's see, five Is and six mys. In three verses, this farmer in this parable referred to himself 11 times in three verses. What does that tell you? I want to tell you something, and I want you to listen closely because it's the truest thing you'll ever hear me say. The most miserable people in the world are selfish people and the happiest people in the world are generous people.

Honestly, I've learned in the church as a pastor, which may be tough to say and hear, but as I've served churches for many, many, many years, I've often learned this is the case in churches. Now, you'd hope that that all generous people go to church and every people in church are generous and happy. Not always the case, but I've learned as a pastor that the people quite often who complain the most give the least. I'm not talking just about money. I'm talking about their skills and their resources. The most miserable people in the church are often the stingiest people in the church.

What do we learn from that? We learn that people who are happy and are generous have learned the secret to life. They've learned that we were created by a generous God for the purpose of generosity. It's in our DNA, and that's why Jesus says, "Those who give their lives away will find it." The secret to life, the secret to fun, the secret to joy is giving ourselves and our resources and our blessings away.

When will we learn that? Of course, the man in the parable never learned it. He thought he would just enjoy his resources, enjoy all the crops, enjoy all of his blessings for himself, and he made the mistake of believing that he had as much time as he had stuff, and he didn't. Watch what Jesus says next in the parable about this, verses 20 through 21. Listen closely. "But God said to him, 'You fool, this very night, your life is being demanded of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves, but are not rich toward God.'"

Now, that's huge. That's big. Jesus said God called this man a fool. Now, listen closely. He was not a fool because he was rich. He was not a fool because he was successful. He was not a fool because he saved. He was not a fool because he was a very good businessman. He was a fool because he did not figure out and realize why he was rich and why he was blessed and why he was successful. Here, he had this stuff and the end of his life was near, and whose was this stuff going to be? Where was it going to go?

You never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul. You see, the tragedy in this man in this parable is he didn't realize he was blessed to be a blessing. It never occurred to him to say, "You know what? All these things I've received, who can be helped by them? Who can I serve? What can I give away?" Therefore, his life and his things and his blessings were a total loss, and God called him a fool.

Now, have you ever asked yourself when you've received more in life and all these blessings, "What can I do to use this stuff to help people? What can I do with these resources to make someone's life better and more joyful? What can I do with these blessings to help alleviate suffering in this world? What can I do?"

I'll tell you, it is a blessing for me when I see people who get this message in their life, when the light bulb turns on and they suddenly realize that the point of their lives is to be a blessing to others, to use their blessings to be a blessings to others and, all of a sudden, their life kicks into another gear and they've suddenly realized the point of their existence.

As a pastor and a church I served many years ago, we were struggling financially. We didn't think we were going to end the year in the black at all and, if we didn't, that meant that meant tough decisions to be made, and there it was. It was around December, towards the end of the year, and I was fretting about it. You don't realize how much pastors fret about such things, and then there was a man who showed up in my office one day.

I can't remember if he called for an appointment or just showed up. I don't recall that, but I do recall the man in the church. He was fairly quiet, kept to himself, didn't do much, but then he came into my office with the biggest check I had ever seen up to that point, and he gave it to me and he said, "Charley, over the last year or two, I've finally realized that I have received many blessings. It took me a long time for me to learn this, but I've finally learned it. I've been stubborn and hardheaded, but I've learned it. Here, I want the church to have this in any way it needs it." He said, "I don't want you to designate it to

anything. I want to give this to you for the church to use it so it can meet its budget and be the church it needs to be."

Now, you don't know how much pastors love those conversations. He realized he was blessed to be a blessing. I tell you, as sure as I stand here and preach, there will come a day when God will ask each of us and He will say to each of us, "I gave you these particular blessings. What did you do with them? I gave you these skills. What did you do with them? I gave you these gifts. What did you do with them? I gave you this freedom. What did you do with it? I gave you the gift of the church. What did you do with it?"

One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. Boy, I learned this a lot once again as a pastor. Over the years, I, like many clergy, have visited nursing homes, and you know what? You can learn a lot in nursing homes, if you pay attention, from the people there, from your experiences and observations, but one of the things that has been consistent for me when I visit nursing homes is that, when you look at these precious people who've come to the end of their lives, you recognize how much they have simplified their lives, because what's in their room is all they have left, and usually it's just pictures of loved ones, letters, maybe drawings from grandkids, a Bible, some sacred emblem," and you know what I discovered? That most of what they own can fit in just a cardboard box. What will be in your box at the end of your life, and what will it represent? One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

Adam Hamilton tells the experience of running into a high school graduate of his from his church at a grocery store many years ago, and the young kid, the young man said, "Oh, hey, pastor, how are you doing? It's great to see you. Remember? You confirmed me several years ago. What's going on?" and Adam said, "Oh, yeah. How are you doing? I remember you." He said, "What's going on?" He said, "What are your plans?" The young man said, "Well, you know what? I've just gotten accepted to an Ivy League school, and I'm so excited to start really soon," and Adam said, "Oh, that's great. That's great. What are you going to do after that?" and he said, "Well, I'm going to go to graduate school and, of course, try to find a high-paying job, a good job."

"Well, that's great," Adam said. "What are you going to do after that?" "Well, I think I'm going to get married, find a wonderful woman to marry and have kids and enjoy life and live in a big house," and he said, "Well, that's great. What are you going to do after that?" He said, "Well, I hope to retire early, and then I can travel the world." He said, "Oh, oh, that's great. Well, what are you going to do after that?" The young man said, "Well, I don't know," and Adam Hamilton said, "You know what? You're a bright, sharp, young man with lots of potential, but I believe you're dreaming way too small." One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. Let's pray.

Eternal God, snap our life back into perspective today. It's easy in the midst of these times especially when we are filled with fear and anxiety to forget that our lives were meant for more than just ourselves, that you call us to reach out, to love the rest of your children with the blessings you've given to us, not only financial resources, but our spiritual gifts, our thoughts, our words, whatever resources we have, and you have given us many. Lord, remind us of that, that our lives do not consist in the abundance of possessions, but rather our love for you and our love for others and the way we live out that love. That's what our lives consist of or should consist of. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

We're going to sing a hymn, and I hope that during these last few months as we've worshiped together that when we sing hymns that you've sung together with your family wherever you're enjoying worship. We're going to sing together. We invite you to join us.