

August 4, 2019

Luke 12: 13-21, 32-34

Prayer: Dear Lord, We are so grateful that you are in our service today. We pray that our worship be pleasing to you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

A Mill Village Treasure

I love all the statues that have gone up as part of Greenville's public art.

There's Max Heller on North Main. Mayor Heller was from Austria and he wanted to re-create Vienna's wide sidewalks for Greenville.

Then there are two students from Sterling High on the corner of North Main and East Washington, commemorating student sit-ins during the Civil Rights era. If you've ever talked to someone who attended or taught at the old Sterling High, you'll know what a source of pride it was.

Joel Poinsett is down on South Main, near the hotel that bears his name.

Across the street is Vardry McBee, a generous and philanthropic landowner known as the Father of Greenville.

On the Peace Center grounds, there's former Governor and Secretary of Education Dick Riley, reading to children.

Down on Main and River, there's Charles Townes, Furman grad, inventor of the maser and Nobel Prize winner.

If you duck down to the entrance to the Governor's School for the Arts, you'll find our old friend Virginia Uldrick. Virginia was the school's founder. In her retirement, she staged concerts to raise money for Triune.

And in front of the Greenville Drive stadium, there's Shoeless Joe Jackson, swinging Black Betsy.

All those statues get a lot of interaction because they are surrounded by foot traffic. But the statue closest to us sees far more automobile traffic and may not be quite as well known. And that's a shame. Because Dr. Pete Hollis, right up here at the fork in the road between Rutherford and Old Buncombe, deserves our attention.

The statue depicts a man with a big stomach that his jacket will hardly button over.

If I were Pete Hollis, I'd come back and haunt the sculptor for that.

But it wonderfully commemorates Lawrence Peter Hollis, or as he was better known, Dr. Pete.

Dr. Pete was a man, Bob Marley might say, who emancipated his mind from mental slavery. His mind and the minds of the mill village students he loved.

Dr. Pete was a man, Jesus might say, who knew where his treasure was, for his heart was there also.

Pete Hollis came to Greenville when he was 21 and became head of the YMCA at Monaghan Mill.

In the early days, residents of Poe Mill, Brandon, Judson, Dunegan, Monaghan, Woodside and Poinsett had some nomadic mill workers. Hollis and the president of Monaghan Mill dispersed seed and fertilizer and brought in a representative from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to teach them gardening. They encouraged the workers to plant back yard gardens, so that they might, quite literally, put down roots.

They also provided pigs and cows for a common pasture, and more land for a rose garden. The idea was to help mill residents take pride in their neighborhoods – a strategy that worked.

Hollis also established clubs and teams through the YMCA. And when he met Dr. James Naismith, the inventor of basketball, he actually introduced basketball to South Carolina. Eventually, Greenville became home to the Southern Textile Basketball Tournament, a national sporting event.

Still, education was scarcely available to the mill children. Each mill operated its own elementary school. But when it came time for the students to go to Greenville High, the mill kids had to pay \$5 a month for tuition plus 12 cents a day for transportation.

Not many of them could afford to do that.

So in 1922, a group of mill executives got the state legislature to create the Parker School District, and they asked Pete Hollis to head it.

From 1923 to his retirement in 1951, that is what Dr. Pete did.

And he made the brand new Parker High School a national model for education.

Parker High started out as a vocational school, teaching woodworking, machine shop, electrical training and cosmetology to the mill students. But Hollis invited national educator John Dewey to town, and the school became a virtual laboratory for Dewey's educational theories.

Parker was one of the first schools to have science fairs and field trips. Educators came from all over the nation and the world to see what was going on there.

In 1941, *Reader's Digest* ran an article, headlined "Mill Town Miracle." It praised Hollis for establishing a school district that "is the center of all community life ... (that) has made the dreary (mill) towns attractive and happy places to live in, (and that has) changed a listless people into self-respecting purposeful citizens."

In 1949, *Look* magazine named Hollis one of the country's 100 finest educators.

Pete Hollis retired in 1951, the year that Parker High was consolidated into the Greenville County School District. So that meant he had headed the Parker School District for the entire 28 years it existed.

Actually, he didn't stop even in retirement. In the 1960s, he helped integrate Greenville's schools and helped create the Singing Christmas Tree, which Virginia Uldrick directed.

Pete Hollis instilled pride and community spirit and educational excellence into the mill villages of this community during the first half of the 20th century. That is why, when the

four-mile Western Corridor was built, which was intended to bring new life and development to a side of town that had fallen on hard times, his name was chosen to grace it.

The city's hope is that the Pete Hollis Highway and the Pete Hollis Corridor will bring pride and community spirit into this neighborhood in the 21st century.

Pete Hollis's treasure – that is, his passion and energy and drive, what he had to spend – was found among the hardworking mill people of west Greenville. And that is most certainly where his heart was.

Our Lord Jesus talked a lot about money and treasure and earthly goods. In fact, he talked about it more than any other subject.

Today's Scripture passage is a collection of incidents and parables and sayings by Jesus about possessions, about treasures – or about what we mistake for treasure.

Please turn with me in your Bibles to **Luke 12: 13-21** and we're going to read some of what Jesus had to say. It's a lot of material, so we are going to skip part of it.

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.'

¹⁴But he said to him, 'Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?' ¹⁵And he 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.'

¹⁶Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?"

¹⁸Then 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. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."

²⁰But 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?" ²¹So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.' ...

In the first incident, Jesus refused to get involved in a dispute between brothers over an inheritance. Instead he used it to comment about greed: **"One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."**

Then he told a parable. We call it the Parable of the Rich Fool. But actually, it's a parable about a hoarder.

I have told this story before, but it is one of my favorites. Nellie Caroline Myer was tall and full-figured, says her granddaughter, a Congregational minister. Nellie loved a good hat, a pretty dress and fire-engine red lipstick.

In the 1950s and 1960s, those uncertain decades when people worried about the possibility of nuclear war, Nellie stored up cans of tomatoes, tuna and beans. During the sugar shortage of the 1970s, she stockpiled sugar – brown, white and raw.

And when we all went a little crazy during the gas shortage of that same decade, Nellie became obsessed with keeping the needle of her Buick’s gas gauge above the three-quarters mark.

Every other day she would go down to the gas station and wait in long lines to top off her tank. Her husband couldn’t reason with her.

“My goodness, Nellie,” he said, “Do we really need to wait in line for gas again? We’ve got three-quarters of a tank.”

And her granddaughter and every other member of the family could recite her answer, word for word: “Well, Jimmy, of course we have to wait in line. *We’ve got to get that gas before the hoarders do!*”

Whatever the chemical or biological or emotional trigger behind it, hoarding is the result of fear – fear that we will go without, fear that we won’t have enough. Fear that God will not provide.

Hoarding disorder is actually on the radar of psychiatrists these days. But we come by it honestly. For the American economy is built upon the notion of scarcity: There are limited resources in the face of unlimited human wants and needs. Scarcity is the bedrock behind the theory of supply and demand.

Right now, I am gorging on strawberries and blueberries and cantaloupes. I'm eating all I want. But this fall, when the prices go up, I won't pay the higher prices.

When things get "scarce," we consumers have to make choices. We can pay a higher price. We can search the grocery ads to see if another store is selling fruit for less. Or we can do what I will do – and not eat strawberries and blueberries and cantaloupe for a few months.

On a very simplified level, this is the first thing you learn in economics class. It is a lesson Nellie Caroline Myer learned well. It is a lesson that the rich fool learned well. And it is a lesson even we internalize.

For we would call the man in Jesus' parable prudent. We'd call him wise. He was preparing for the future.

But that's not how Jesus saw it. When God calls the man a fool in this parable, it's the same word we find in Psalm 14: 1: **"Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God.'"**

So this is what is going on. This storing up of goods is seen as a dismissal of God's care, a flagrant statement that there is no God.

In the next verses, Jesus talks about how God feeds the ravens and clothes the lilies. But I want us to focus on the last three verses of this section, **Luke 12: 32-34:**

32 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Now there's hyperbole here, there's exaggeration, there's symbolism. Jesus is painting an idyllic picture that Paul then has to correct in II Thessalonians: **"If a man will not work, he shall not eat."** (3:10)

Apparently some early Christians interpreted Jesus's statements to mean they could stop working and simply wait for his return while God took care of them.

But that wasn't quite right either.

The idea is not to wait idly for the kingdom of God.

The idea is to direct our treasure, direct what really matters, to the kingdom of God.

Crops and money and houses and boats and jewelry and Jet Skis will not transcend this life.

What will transcend this life are the relationships, the things we do for others, the alms we give, not the alms we hoard.

I have seen statues of many men and women. But I've never seen one that celebrated the person who died with the most toys. Statues always stand to someone who has given him or herself to others, whether in battle or philanthropy or education or medicine.

Pete Hollis died when he was 95. I have no idea how much money he had, and I'm pretty sure no one else in Greenville knows or cares. But there are thousands and thousands of people who care that he had a passion for educating the children of Greenville's mill villages.

That's why there's a statue of him at the fork of Rutherford Street. That's why Buncombe Road and the Western Corridor were renamed the Pete Hollis Highway. That's why Triune is now located in the Pete Hollis Corridor District.

“Where your treasure is,” Jesus said, **“there your heart will be also.”**

Pete Hollis' treasure – his passion, his energy, his drive, and no doubt, his money – was in the mill villages. And that's where his heart was.

Think about what you treasure, what you spend your time and money and energy on. Is it something that will last beyond this lifetime?

Is it something that will live on in the lives of others?

Is it something that deserves your heart?

For wherever your treasure lies, that is truly where your heart will be.

Amen.