

**United Methodist Church
Solon, IA**

Rev C A Kress

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Scripture:

Luke 12:16-21

And then he told then a parable, "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, "What should I do? For I have no place to store 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 goods laid up for many years. So relax, eat, drink and be merry!" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night you 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."

Title: Whose dream was this?

Wow, that's quite a scripture lesson, isn't it?

Just when this guy thinks he finally has it made,

Just when he's making more money than he has bills to pay

His dream of success is short-lived.

God wakes him up in the middle of the night to learn the rules of the game have changed.

All he's dreamed of and yearned for and worked hard to receive – well – whose will it be now?

As you've figured out, we're working through a little book entitled ENOUGH by Adam Hamilton. And he has a lot to say about our American dream. He begins by saying that at first the American dream started out as the idea that every citizen of the United States would have an equal opportunity to escape poverty and have enough to feel secure.

And the image that went with that dream is depicted in Norman Rockwell's famous print from 1943.



Here it is.

Do any of you recognize the image?

Do you know the name of it?

The name is "Freedom from Want".

Look at this picture.

Do you see the plain white curtains?

Yes, there's a large turkey, but look at the other things that are being served on the thanksgiving table. There are celery stalks in a dish and a little fruit.

Would you say there is abundance here?

Is there over-indulgence?

Look at the table. Simple setting

The scene is a world away from the kind of table Martha Stewart thinks we should set.

Where is the centerpiece?

Where is the 21 piece place setting?

Where is the domestic help?

In our world of today the American dream isn't the freedom FROM want -

We've turned the concept on it's head and live in a world where we have freedom TO want.

We've heard politicians tell us that the patriotic thing to do during tough times is to go SHOPPING.

And from the 1950's – a time of Happy Days, Thunderbirds and Elvis Presley and the beginning of the space age – the American dream has become more and more fixated on owning things.

Do any of you remember when your family got their first TV?

Now how many TV's are in your house? (I have three – one for me and both of the cats).

And, the last time my friend Laurie-Ann came to visit we watched a movie. Laurie-Ann told me that next time we need to go to her house to watch a movie.

She said, 'Well, it's kind of like looking through a porthole when we watch your TV, Carol – it's so small!

I hadn't even noticed it was small – but now I keep eyeing the bigger TV's in the store – maybe I DO need one.

Do you know how it is when you start thinking about something like that?

I don't know, is Laurie-Ann a friend or not!!

Think of the way things have changed since the 1950's (I recognize that not everyone here can remember that far back) but aside from TV's.

We just seem to need more stuff to get by in this world.

But here's the craziest thing -

Dave Ramsey says that while Americans are living better and better (if that's defined as living with more and more things surrounding them).

The fact is we are feeling worse and worse about our own selves.

We're unhappy with the kind of life we're living.

I remember when I was moving from Decorah to Solon – it was a week before the move and I wasn't nearly all packed.

I had this dream about the moving van coming to take me away and there was this conveyer belt we were tossing boxes on and the boxes were being dumped into a hole at the top of the moving van and the sides of the van were bulging until the whole thing popped like a container of jiffy popcorn!

And there were still more boxes coming down the conveyer belt! That dream wasn't so far from the truth!

Now, we can talk all day about this fever for acquiring things that seems to have

infected hearts and souls everywhere.

There's a lot that can be said about the condition of our hearts and souls. And there's plenty to say about the way our economic system pushes us into this unhealthy relationship with money and possessions.

And frankly I don't want to use my time to read off statistics about how in the 1950's the average American family had 3 ½ children and lived in houses that averaged 1800 square feet. While today the average American family has 1.75 children and our houses average 3,000 square feet.

I mean, doesn't that tell you enough?

Or, I could tell you that tonight at financial peace university I'm cutting up (THIS) credit card.

It's my Amazon credit card. I got it because it helped me qualify for 10% off on an order for books that totaled about \$150.

(I saved \$15).

But if I tell you what they're charging me in interest, can you keep my secret? (30%).

Yah, I'm cutting it up tonight that card came no where near saving me \$15 – Chase Bank would love for me to keep it!

The sad thing is that I bet you a dime to a dollar that there are plenty others in the Solon zip code that are playing a juggling act with cards just like this one.

But the whole point is that issues with possessions and money are just symptoms a hole we're trying to fill in all the wrong ways.

The Bible says that in the beginning God gave us life.

The blessings of a good creation and God's love.

All we had to do was receive it with open hands.

That should have been enough for us, but it wasn't.

Could it be that we are afraid?

We were afraid that the promise of God's help and provision wouldn't be enough.

Perhaps we were even afraid that God's love wouldn't be enough.

This fear, that we will not have enough and that we can't trust God for “enough” blocks the relationship.

So instead of receiving life and God's love with open hands, we set out to grab for life on our own.

We grab for what we think will fill that fear in us that we won't have ENOUGH or be ENOUGH.

And that's what the very first story (about humanities fall from grace) in the Bible is all about.

So what's the solution to this nightmare in which we find ourselves?

That's what this study and preaching emphasis is designed to help us see and practice.

We're going to try and give you some biblical guidance and some practical tools for changing the relationships we have with money and stuff and our spiritual connection with God.

So keep coming back.

But here's the first clue; it starts with simplicity.

It's no accident that in Luke's gospel Jesus' parable of the rich man and his bad dream is followed by Jesus saying, "Look at the birds of the air and the flowers of the field.

They neither slumber nor sleep and yet the Lord our God takes care of them. They trust that. The birds and the flowers don't worry about having ENOUGH, so, why should we?

We're the crown of creation, after all.

So, it should be logical that we can trust in God's love and care and protection all the more.

When I conduct weddings I have often said a little prayer that goes "Lord, I don't ask for you to give this couple everything they want.

You don't need to fulfill their every dream.

But, Lord, I DO ask that you will give them all they need to allow them to live from one day to the next;

to delight in their love for each other and to celebrate together your gift of guidance and grace." Amen –

Adam Hamilton says, "I'm not suggesting that we never buy anything for ourselves or that we never take another great vacation."

He says, "in fact, I have to tell you that my wife and I have just bought a brand new car for the first time in my life! - it's a KIA Soul (because it seemed appropriate for a minister to have a soul!)

But Hamilton does say “I am suggesting that with God's help we try to simplify our lives and silence the voices that are constantly telling us we need more. He says, “I'm suggesting that we try living counter-culturally, that is, below not above our means.

And the first step is to pray.

Adam Hamilton's prayer:

“Lord, help me to be grateful for what I have,

To remember that I don't need most of what I want.

And that joy is found in simplicity and generosity.” Amen (repeat)

What do you say?

I invite you to join me as we trade in the pursuit of the American nightmare which the American dream has become.

Let's trade it in for God's vision of who we can become.

Because you've heard me say it before and I fully believe that God's dreams are higher and better and more awesome than any dream we might conjure up for ourselves.

Believe in him and believe in his power to set things right and transform our very hearts.

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¹David Kamp, “Rethinking the American Dream” in *Vanity Fair* (April 2009). To read this excellent article in its entirety, go to .

²Prior to the sermon, during the children's time, I told the story of the ant and the grasshopper from Aesop's Fables, the moral, as I re-framed it, being “do your work first, then play.”

³M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1978). “Life is a series of problems. Do we want to moan about them or solve them? Do we want to teach our children to solve them? Discipline is the basic set of tool we require to solve life's problems... What makes life difficult is that the process of confronting and solving problems is a painful one. . . But if we are to achieve mental and spiritual health, let us teach ourselves and our children the necessity for suffering and the value thereof, the need to face problems directly and to experience the pain involved. . . Delaying gratification is the process of scheduling the pain and pleasure of life in such way as to enhance the pleasure by meeting the pain first and getting it over with. It is the only decent way to live” (pp. 15-19).

⁴See [Credit card debt statistics – Compiled by HoffmanBrinker.com](http://www.hoffmanbrinker.com/credit-card-debt-statistics.html)
www.hoffmanbrinker.com/credit-card-debt-statistics.html.

The site goes on to state the Statistics of a recent Consumer Reports survey:

One-third of Americans do not own a credit card.

54% pay their balance in full each month

33% carry balances up to \$10,000 (median balance: \$2,254)

13% carry balances over \$10,000 (median balance: \$17,366)

⁵Luke 12:24-28:

²⁴Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁶If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil

nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ²⁸But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith