

Speedy
[Luke 12:13-21](#)
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Today I want to tell you a story – it’s a true story. When Johanna and I got married, she had a year left to finish her bachelor’s degree, so for that year I worked at a Cold Beer and Wine store in downtown Maple Ridge. Every day I went to work, and unloaded beer off the trucks into the cooler, and from the cooler to the shelves, and worked the tills and counted inventory. And I counted empties. Back then, any store that sold alcohol legally had to accept empty cans and bottles and repay the deposit, so we had a window outside our store where people could bring their cans and we would count them and stack them and pay the deposit – each empty beer bottle or can was worth ten cent. And so of course, every morning when I arrived at work there would be few of the local homeless guys waiting outside the empties window, bringing in the cans they had gathered the previous evening to trade in for cash. Even back then Maple Ridge had a surprisingly large homeless population, and over the year I worked there I got to know most of them pretty well, one way or another. And most of the time, after we’d counted out the empties and chatted a bit about the weather and things and I’d given them their cash for their bottles and cans, most of these guys would take that money inside the store and buy themselves a beer or two, but there was one man who never spent a dime at our store – in the entire year I was there, I never once saw him actually come inside the building to spend the money he’d earned. He usually had more bottles than any of the others, and he would very politely count them out and

take his change and leave. Everybody called him Speedy, maybe because he could talk a mile a minute if you got him going, and we would joke with him about how we never saw him spend any of his money. “Nope,” he’d say “I’m saving up, I’m saving up, going to save up to buy a crib, a great big crib made of gold, a solid gold crib.” What do you want a crib for? “Well, once I got the crib, I’m going to buy a baby to put in the crib.” Wow – that sounds pretty expensive. “Oh yeah, it’s gonna cost a million dollars, so I gotta save up, gotta save up.” Every day Speedy came in to our store, and we would ask him how it was going, was he getting closer, what would the crib be like, and so on. He was a bit of a strange guy, but he was always friendly and smiling, kind and respectful to our staff, easy to talk to, and we always looked forward to seeing him every morning, waiting outside the window with his bag full of cans.

And then I came in to work sometime in February, and one of my co-workers told me that during the night Speedy had had a massive heart attack, and he had died. He was digging through the dumpster behind the Dairy Queen looking for cans, and his heart just gave out on him. And it was amazing what a loss that was for all of us – work suddenly was less fun, less joyful without seeing Speedy at the empties window every week.

And that should have been the end of the story – all too familiar and tragic, but nothing unusual. But a few days later, we heard the news going around from some of Speedy’s friends. It turns out that he had been telling us the truth. He *had* been saving up. He had opened a savings account at a local bank, and every day after he left our store, he went to his bank and he put all his money from all those bottles

and cans in his account, and when he died, Speedy had almost one hundred thousand dollars saved up in that bank account. He had told us he wasn't going to rest until he had a million dollars, and he had made it a tenth of the way.

Now, I have no way of knowing how or where he got all that money – maybe it had all really come from bottles and cans, ten cents at a time, bending down over and over again to pick up one million empty cans and bottles one at a time. I just remember thinking how tragic it was that he had done all that work, and saved all that money, and all to buy something that didn't actually exist. You can't buy a solid gold crib, you can't buy a baby to put in it – these things aren't real, they were just some strange thing Speedy's mind had fixated on, and he couldn't see anything else, it was all he wanted. I kept wondering what I would have said to him if I saw him the day before he died, if I could have warned him somehow – Speedy, there's no such thing as a golden crib, you can't buy a baby, these things you think are so important, they're meaningless, they don't matter, just let them go. Go get a nice dinner, get a hotel room and have a long bath and a good night's sleep in a warm bed, don't go out looking for cans and bottles, because this very night your life will be demanded of you. Don't throw it away.

I thought that was the last I'd hear about Speedy, but again, I was surprised. A few days later, I came into work and there, on the staff bulletin board, was an obituary that someone had cut out of the local paper. And it was for Speedy. It turns out that while Speedy was homeless, he wasn't alone. He had a family, he had brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews who cared about him. They lived out in Ontario and they had always wanted him to come home, they had always

been waiting for him to come home, and they had never lost touch and never given up hoping that it would happen one day. And though that day never came, his family still came out from Ontario, they gathered in Maple Ridge with his friends from the street to celebrate and give thanks for his life and commit him into God's care. And there in his obituary, I finally learned Speedy's real name – it was Ron.

Now, I don't know if anyone here can relate to Speedy's story – a life on the street, poverty, homelessness, mental illness, those are all things that can seem very far away from the comfortable surroundings of a Presbyterian church on Sunday morning. But the fact that Speedy wasted his life and strength chasing after cans and bottles and a golden crib, all these things that are utterly useless and meaningless, I think that is all too familiar to us here. Every time we think that our work is the most important thing about us, when we throw ourselves into getting that next paycheck or that next promotion, when we measure the quality of our life by the size of our bank account, we're chasing tin cans. Every time we think that our appearance is the most important thing about us, when we evaluate our self-worth based on how our hair looks or how fashionable our clothes are, we're chasing tin cans. Every time we think that our reputation is the most important thing about us, when we care so much about what other people around us think of us, when we try so hard to make everyone think we're strong and smart and self-reliant so they never suspect the pain and suffering that lies just under the skin, we're chasing tin cans. All day every day our world tells us that all these things are so very, very important, that our social status and our income, how our skin looks, how our lawn looks, these are the measures by which we should evaluate the

success or failure of our lives, and so we dutifully throw ourselves into this all-consuming fixation to get this thing we've been told will make us happy, and it just doesn't work. It never works. It's all just tin cans and empty cribs. The day will come for me and for you, for all of us, when our lives will be demanded of us, and on that day the true value of all these things that we have squandered our lives chasing after will become perfectly clear.

And we don't have to do it. We don't have to keep chasing after all these utterly empty, meaningless things, we don't have to waste our lives scrounging for approval and pleasure and security and comfort wherever we can find them, trying to build a life out of the rubble of this fallen world. We don't need to do it, because we have a family. We have a Father who longs for us to return to him, who stands waiting and watching for his children to come home to him, a Father who so loved this world that he sent his son here to be with us so that we can all be called sons and daughters of the most high God. In Jesus Christ we have a brother who emptied himself of all power and dignity and became a human being like you and me so that we could see and hear and know our creator face to face, he came to us to seek out and save the lost. We have a family – so why do we live like we're orphans? We have an eternal home, so why do we live like we're homeless? Every moment we have on this planet is an incredible gift, an opportunity to grow closer and closer to the God who created us, who died to save us, who calls us by name, the names we were given before the universe was even imagined, and that God wants to bless us with everything we could possibly desire, with approval and pleasure and security and comfort, all the things we try and shabbily assemble through our own strength

here on earth, in him those things are truly found, when we seek him first. And as we seek him, and as we find him, we begin to look on this broken world with new eyes – as members of the family of God, we start to see everyone on this planet as family, as our brothers and sisters, and we can give of ourselves, give of what we have so that all the Speedys in this world will know that they belong to God, that they are part of his family, that in him every blessing can be found.

And that is why we gather here, here in this place, each and every week. We come to be reminded of who we belong to, to be reminded of what the most important thing in this world truly is, to be reminded of the only thing that will endure when everything else in this world fades away. We come to be reminded that Jesus Christ died for us, so that we can live, so that we can be part of the family of God. We leave everything else behind, and come to gather in our Father's house, and remember where we belong, remember who we are, remember what it feels like to come home. In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen.