Have you heard of the book, *“The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up,”* by Marie Kondo? Kondo is a decluttering expert; she makes her living going into her clients' homes, helping them pare down their belongings, then finding a tidy way of storing everything. The whole concept revolves around touching each item and deciding if that item gives you joy or not. An item of clothing that gave you joy when you bought it but now is three sizes too small? Donate it. A calendar from 1998 that is cluttering your kitchen drawer? Toss it. That cassette player in the basement that you have no cassettes for? Let it go. You get the idea. Kondo says that when you get rid of things you no longer need or want, your life actually gets less chaotic and more focused, allowing you room for what really matters.

We're trying Kondo's method, Billy and I, in an effort to get out from underneath some of the stuff that often feels like it's closing in on us. Kondo lays out an order for doing this. She suggests starting with clothes, then going through all the others things cluttering a home, then ending with mementos, the hardest things to part with. We did start with clothes, making stacks of what we would keep, donate or throw away. It took a while but by the time we finished, we had about half the number of clothes we started with, maybe even more like a third. Now when we look in our closets, we have pieces of clothing that fit and that we like, and we have never woken up with nothing to wear that day. I will admit that I sometimes have a relationship that borders on obsession with shoes, so that was the hardest part for me. For Billy, it was books, though in her no-nonsense approach, Kondo says that if you give away a book and finding yourself wanting to read it again, you can go to the library or buy another. Though Kondo sometimes sounds like a drill sergeant barking out orders, her ideas and her methods work. I'm looking forward to the time when I can find a spoon in a drawer overfilled with kitchen stuff or know exactly where the band aids are. My motivation comes from a desire to not be possessed by my things. It also comes from the piercing truth told to me years ago by a visitor from Papua New Guinea. This man had traveled through Virginia, staying with members of Lutheran churches. He spoke about staying in some lovely homes, then made this observation, “In this country, you make homes for things. In our country, we make homes for people.”

I have never forgotten those words. They point out the high standard of living of most of our country. Those words also sum up the lust of our culture, the belief that the things we see advertised on TV or in magazines and catalogs will truly make our lives better, will fill the holes in our lives. The rich fool in Jesus' parable believed a full barn could lead to contentment and happiness, but Jesus speaks of the man as one who stored up treasures for himself and left no room in his life for God. The man's land had produced beyond his wildest dreams. Soon he had no place to store his crops, so he decided to tear down his barn and build a bigger one. He imagined himself retiring then, resting in the shade of his big barn of grain. Then he would have time to eat, drink and be merry. “You fool!” God chided him. “What if you were to die tonight? What good would all the things you have accumulated be to you then?”

I don't think Jesus was saying that material things are evil. His message is that our possessions can so take over our lives that we have time for little else outside the kingdoms of stuff we build for ourselves. Listen to the words of the man in the parable:

“***I*** will do this.” “***I*** will pull down my barns and build bigger ones.” “There ***I*** will store all my grain and goods.” “Then ***I*** will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.” These are all “I” statements. There doesn't seem to be any room in his plans for anyone else. No thought of sharing some of his stored up goods with a hungry person. No thanks to God for what God has given him. No concept of what is enough, because we know all that “eat, drink and be merry” talk will likely be a short pause in his activity before the man is building even more barns for even more grain.

We who live in a culture of conspicuous consumption face the same temptations as the man in Jesus' story. It's so easy to believe the messages all around us – messages that manipulate us to believe that more stuff will make us happy and less anxious about the future. Of course there are many in our country and world who don't have enough of life's basic needs for food and shelter and safety. These are not the people Jesus is talking about. Jesus is talking about those who have enough to share but won't, for fear that they won't have enough for themselves down the road.

What would Jesus rather have us spend our time and energy on, if not on more and more barns of grain, bigger houses, more stuff in our closets to wear? The answer is *relationships*. Relationships are important to Jesus. Jesus came to earth to restore our relationship with God, a relationship that gets fractured by sin. Jesus came to join us in relationship with one another. Jesus knows that when stuff gets in our way, we are not able to see one another clearly, not able to see the need in our neighbor's eyes. Here's the hard truth, sisters and brothers in Christ: Your life is not all about you. It is not all about what you have or how much you can hoard; it's about what you do with what you have and how you treat people along the way. For all of us, drawn into relationship with one another by our brother Christ, this life together is about constantly redrawing the barriers that separate us from one another. It's about pushing beyond our comfort zones until we are in relationship with those we never would have encountered if we simply stayed home and counted the grain in our barns.

I'm not saying I have all this figured out. At times, I still buy things I don't really need for the momentary high of buying them. Sometimes I think I need all the square footage we have in our house, though deep down I know I really don't. What is becoming more and more clear to me is that I can't reach out and touch someone if there is a pile of stuff

between us. So Billy and I will continue to tidying up process and we invite you to join in with whatever method works for you. We will do this together, not just to get rid of extraneous matter, but to make room in our hearts for what is really important – building relationships with those we know and love and those we will meet today and tomorrow.

Amen.

*Pentecost 11C*

*July 31, 2016*

*Floyd-Willis Lutheran Parish*

*Luke 12:13-21*