

The Penknife  
Luke 12:13-21

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Today I want to tell you about my grandfather's penknife. His knife was nothing special, not a Swiss army knife, no fancy gadgets or pull outs of any kind. It was just a silver, two bladed pocketknife. This little penknife only really had one thing going for it that made it special, the fact that it belonged to my grandfather.

So what does my grandfather's penknife have to do with our readings today? Well let me just tell you a little more about the knife. You see this knife as long as I can remember was always in my grandfather's pocket. As kids my brother and sister and I would spend many summer days down at their house on Deborah Ave. on the North Side of the Baltimore near Perry Hall. And we would do all sorts of things. Like fly kits, go fishing, play games. And whenever there was a need to cut something, be it a kit string or a fishing line, my grandfather's hand would go deep down into his pocket and scrunch around feeling around for his penknife. And then he would pull it out, open the blade, and cut whatever was needed. When working around the house, painting, fixing the siding, working on the back porch, miniature train garden or in the vegetable garden, this knife was always there. As far back as I can remember my grandfather had this knife.

Then my grandparents, back in the 1990's decided that they were getting to old to take care of that house anymore and the property that surrounded it and they decided to move out to a one floor condo closer to my Parents. On thanksgiving of that year, all of us in the family were invited to gather one last time at their house on Deborah Ave. And that year my grandfather and grandmother divvied out the stuff they couldn't take with them. They gave away some furniture, some belongings of all kinds. My parents took some furniture and stored a bunch of other stuff in their basement. My brother got some tools and rosebushes that he could replant at his house, my sister got some chairs and a lot of old records. I got some dishes and some books. And through all this packing and moving, my grandfather had his knife. He could reach into his pocket and pull it out and cut off some string or packing tape for wrapping, he would cut down boxes using that knife and when finished he'd put it back into his pocket for the next time.

For a few years my grandparents lived in this third floor condo in Bel Air and every time I went to visit, I noticed that my Grandfather still carried that knife. When ever we gathered and exchanged gifts like at birthdays or Christmas, Grandpop pulled out that penknife to cut off the ribbons that tied the packages up. That knife was always there.

Then with his health failing and restricted to a wheel chair and my grandmother's mind not like it used to be, they decided it was time to move to a nursing home where they both would be able to live together in a one room bedroom with a little sitting area attached. The home was over on route 74 South of York in Dallastown right around the corner from my Uncle's house. The home provided the meals and the housekeeping and most all the furniture a person could need. So once again our family showed up at my grandparents place in Bel Air and helped divvy up the remaining kitchen appliances and dishes, books and furniture.

For a few months my grandfather and grandmother were comfortable in this new place. It wasn't their place but it was okay. And when you went to visit you would notice a card table in the one corner where my grandfather could get under with his wheel chair and do the bills and open envelopes. And yep you guessed it, that was where he would reach into his pants pocket and pull out his knife to open those letters and bills just as you would with a letter opener.

Then in the beginning of 2004, my grandfather's health had deteriorated so much he needed to be moved to the Manor care in York into a hospital like room – four men to a room. There he was given a drawer that was his, that my uncle and my mother put his shaving stuff, a change of clothes and some other toiletries and that was about it. But in his pocket even there he still had his penknife.

Later in the Spring when they took him for the last time to York Hospital he had three personal items besides his clothes that they put in a plastic zip-lock bag that they gave to my uncle. In the bag was his watch, his glasses, and yes his penknife.

I picked up the urn of his cremated remains from the funeral home in York. And when we took him to Indian Town Gap cemetery for burial the penknife was there with him. It was no longer in his pocket, since he could not ever use that penknife again in this world. But it was there with me, given to me.

So what does my Grandfather's penknife have to do with our reading today? Nothing and Everything. That knife is an ever present reminder to me that our human shells on earth will perish and we will be no more. That one day we will pass from this world into the kingdom of God. My Grandfather had worked decades scrapping by to own his own home. He had possessions, a club or two he was a part of, hobbies and keepsakes, like that penknife that meant a lot to him. But when he grew older that stuff had to be given away, until finally all that remained was what he had on his back that moment he breathed his last. And even then in death they took away his watch, his glasses and his penknife and zipped them up in a plastic bag and gave them away. The lesson we learn from this is that each of us will one day take that same journey. We acquire stuff, house, a car, a boat, a sofa, a chair, some silverware, and

jewelry, a pile of boards and a coffee can of nuts and bolts you just can't get rid of. We buy into whatever the latest must have item is that will make us happy. But in the greater scheme of life this stuff means nothing. The only thing that remains when we are declared dead, the only thing that remains when they bag up our last few remaining possessions in a zip lock baggie and give them away, is the Lord God Almighty and his eternal love for us. When the end comes and the resurrection moment takes place the only thing that matters at that point is that the Lord is calling you by name and knows you and says welcome good and trustworthy servant.

This is what Jesus is trying to get across to his listeners and to us in our Gospel reading. That we should be more concerned with being rich towards God than the stuff that fills our pockets. Because these pockets and that stuff will one day belong to someone else. But God's love stays with you and saves you for eternity. That is the only retirement plan that is 100% guaranteed and assured.

Its not that working and planning, investing and buying goods and services is a bad thing. Rather it is a reminder that we shouldn't put all our confidence in those things. You can save for years and years and feel like you are safe, but in one quick swoop your home, your health, your savings can be gone. The problem with stuff and money and financial goals is when it controls our lives. Dividing us and driving us to the point of anger, deception, to theft all to get stuff. Each of us in Jesus' parable is challenged with this same message. What is it we are relying on, what do we invest in that all important before anything else? Yes, we need to have stuff in life. We need to prepare for rainy days and practice good stewardship, but we must never allow it to become our central focus of life of purpose of all meaning. Rather Jesus tells us to invest in being rich towards God. I look at that knife and nothing in this world is mine. Everything will pass to someone else one day. If it can happen to my grandfather's knife then it surely happens to my stuff. But I know my grandfather was rich towards God, faithful and devoted, and he truly relied on that promise of God's inheritance for us as his children in his eternal kingdom. This day we as asked to look at ourselves and think about what it is we rely on, what we invest in, what is ultimately put all our hope into. May you choose God this day. May the peace and grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. Amen.