

Where geese corrupt: Foraging for illustrations

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [November 7, 2001](#) issue

We occasional preachers forage for illustrative material just as desperately as do those who produce weekly sermons. Recently I sought material that would help me render Luke 12:32-40 in contemporary terms: “Sell 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. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Sell possessions? I don’t have the courage to ask that of Americans, fearing it might be read as an attack on supply-side economics, which is part of our other religion. Give alms? The congregation does that reasonably well already. Implicitly, the text says: do not mess with purses that wear out. I did not expect to spot too many cheap handbags in the greeting line after the service. “Where no thief comes near”? We are as burglar-proofed as any other community. No relevant refreshing illustrations there, either.

“Where no moth destroys.” Ah! There was my opportunity. Moths were the surreptitious antagonists of valuables in olden days. I looked for a story of “now.”

Then the Lord delivered into my hands an issue of the *Wall Street Journal* containing a long article that screamed “relevant” and “illustrative” to me. The headline: “The Bane of the Billionaires.” Think billionaire and who comes to mind? The sultan of Brunei and any member of the Arkansas Walton family, of course. But to most people the billionaires and “layers-up of treasures on earth” who immediately spring to mind are the Seattle dot.comers who use every contemporary device available to assure that all will go well for them—even in down times.

Picture their multi-multimillion-dollar mansions and chateaus. Then picture all the devices that protect these places from thieves or gawkers. Think of the lakeshore setting of these palaces. What could possibly go wrong with these homes? Their owners have thought of everything.

Or have they? Rebecca Buckman tells us what could and did and does go wrong. Not moths or thieves but Canada geese corrupt these treasures. The estates are an ideal

geese habitat, as Donald Harris, an official of the park department, points out. He discusses various wild devices homeowners have dreamed up to protect their treasures on earth from these marauders: makeshift fences, Mylar kites, pinwheels.

What makes geese such pests? “Look at all the shit on that dock,” Harris says. Splats abound as each goose drops one to three pounds per day. This in the domains of Bill Gates, Paul Allen and Craig McCaw. “We come home from work, we go down to get on our boat and we walk through 28 pounds of goose shit,” say the householders.

Owners have tried to fight the geese with light sensors, fake eagles and rods that whip around in the wind. One paid a kid to chase geese. Another pays a woman \$30,000 a year to bring her sheepdogs to patrol his grounds. It doesn’t work. So the billionaires—or, more likely, their serfs—have to use snow shovels to deal with the problem.

The geese “pretty much own all the yards on the lake,” says venture capitalist Steve Hooper of Hunts Point. In one hour geese ruined a lawn just prepared for the birthday party of his 16-year-old. And, of course, as the billionaires form antigoose forces, the anti-antigoose brigades, enjoying the blight fallen upon those with treasures on earth, are free to prepare “an unfailing treasure in heaven.”

If we know human nature, they are more likely rubbing their earthly hands together in *Schadenfreude*-inspired glee. Is anyone in the crowd getting the point of Luke’s Gospel?