


“Do We Need Bigger Barns?”

Sunday, July 31, 2016

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

 **(Luke 12:13-21, MSG)**

The Story of the Greedy Farmer

Someone out of the crowd said, *“Teacher, order my brother to give me a fair share of the family inheritance.”*

He replied, *“Mister, what makes you think it’s any of my business to be a judge or mediator for you?”*

Speaking to the people, he went on, *“Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot.”*

Then he told them this story:

“The farm of a certain rich man produced a terrific crop. He said to himself: ‘What can I do? My barn isn’t big enough for this harvest.’ Then he said, ‘Here’s what I’ll do: I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll gather in all my grain

and goods, and I'll say to myself, Self, you've done well! You've got it made and can now retire. Take it easy and have the time of your life!

“Just then God showed up and said, ‘Fool! Tonight you die. And your barnful of goods? Who gets it?’

“That’s what happens when you fill your barn with SELF and not with God.”

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

[2nd Service: Affirmation of Faith]

[MESSAGE]

We hear a lot these days about the “prosperity gospel”.

Simply put, the “prosperity gospel” teaches that God wants believers to be physically healthy, materially wealthy, and personally happy.

Teachers of this gospel encourage their followers to pray for and even demand material success from God.

One such preacher writes: “*When we pray, believing that we have already received what we*

are praying, God has no choice but to make our prayers come to pass. It is a key to getting results as a Christian.” (Creflo Dollar)

In some ways it may seem that this is not completely unreasonable; certainly God wants us to have what we need and to be happy.

But, more than 100 years ago, Charles Spurgeon preached:

“I believe that it is anti-Christian and unholy for any Christian to live with the object of accumulating wealth. You will say, ‘Are we not to strive all we can to get all the money we can?’ You may do so. I cannot doubt but what, in so doing, you may do service to the cause of God. But what I said was that to live *with the object* of accumulating wealth is anti-Christian.”

In today’s reading, Jesus exposes human greed and anxiety about money and burns away any illusion that the godly life is synonymous with the American ideals of prosperity and success.

Let us pray...Thank you, Lord, for bringing us to your word this morning. Help us to see beyond our distractions to understand what it means to live “*rich toward God*”. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

I want to be clear that this sermon is **NOT** about distributive economics, nor is it a criticism of people who enjoy financial success in their lives. I don’t think the message of Scripture is that you should reject being paid for your labor or you should be short-sighted in providing for your family.

Having money that you earned is not the issue.

Paul told Timothy, “*The **LOVE** of money is the root of evil.*”

Dr. Spurgeon said: *the goal of accumulating wealth for the sake of wealth is **anti-Christian**.*

Remember the story of Mary and Martha?

These were two sisters who once threw a big party for Jesus.

Martha was real busy cooking and serving and tending to the party; she got upset because Sister Mary wasn't helping.

Instead, Mary was listening to Jesus teach.

So, Jesus tells Martha to get over it because it is she who is “*distracted by many things.*”

In the midst of all her busy-ness and stress, Martha has lost her perspective.

Like Martha, the rich farmer in today's story is distracted and has lost his perspective.

He is focused on all the resources he has and how to preserve them, while missing the whole point of his abundance.

He's all about: “**my** crops” and “**my** grain” and “**my** stuff” and he only sees “**my** chance to kick back and relax.”

He even refers to Isaiah 22:13, only he leaves out the important part: “Eat, drink, and be merry...*for tomorrow we die!*”

Yet another example of someone pulling Scripture out of context to suit their own agenda and missing the point entirely.

Our farmer's distraction with the dilemma of where to put all his stuff means that he is missing out on the blessing his abundance represents.

Where did this bounteous harvest come from?

In fact, where has all of his success come from?

It might seem that we hear Jesus saying that our lives and our possessions are gifts from God, intended to be used to advance God's mission of care and compassion, especially for those who lack the resources to provide for themselves.

Clearly, Jesus has told us all along to feed, to tend, to care for, to visit, and so forth.

The gospel message has always been about giving generously and serving selflessly.

Jesus never suggested that people who have stuff should hang onto their stuff when others don't have any stuff.

Imagine how this parable might read from within a different context.

For someone living in poverty, with no access to the resources needed to produce or accumulate wealth, the promise of abundance would not be taken lightly.

The stark contrast between their reality and the life of the rich farmer would be painful for them to ponder.

They might even wonder how they might get their share of what God is providing.

This parable teaches everyone, rich and poor alike, to think carefully about what we want and why we want it.

New Testament professor Audrey West wonders:
“Are our desires and standards for what is enough driven by a determination to store up treasures for our own pleasure, or by our understanding of God’s blessings and our true purpose in life? Will we measure our lives by the standards of the media,

seducing us to want more and more, or by the call of the gospel to be rich toward God?”

And, what does it mean to be **“rich toward God”**?

It is using your resources for the benefit of your neighbor in need, as the Samaritan did in the story we heard three Sundays ago.

It is intentionally listening to Jesus’ words in spite of the distractions, as Mary did in the Martha and Mary story.

Being rich toward God is prayerfully trusting that God will provide for the needs of life as the Israelites learned in the wilderness and as Jesus taught us to pray for our daily provision.

Maybe it means selling possessions to give alms as a means of storing up eternal treasure in heaven.

It might mean sharing more and keeping less; doing more and sitting less.

Only you can discern what this parable is calling you to do, but discernment requires that you are

free from distractions to achieve proper perspective.

I've often noticed at funerals that people eulogize a person by telling stories.

These are usually personal and heart-warming recollections that help us to know who that person really was.

The ones that come up most often are about that person's generosity.

“She gave so much to the church as a volunteer. She was always there when anyone needed help. And she made the best casseroles for pot luck dinners.”

“He worked tirelessly to support so many wonderful causes in our community.”

You've all heard these kinds of stories.

I don't ever remember a eulogy that remembered how much money a person had, or what kind of fancy car they drove, or how big the estate was that they left behind for the children to inherit.

Nobody cares about that stuff in the end; what matters is the generosity of their hearts and spirits.

Now, I understand there is a thing called “prudence”.

It is prudent to use your barn to store and protect what you need for you and your family.

I also understand that some barns are rightfully bigger than others.

- The danger here is making your barn your god.
- When you do that you get distracted.
- Your fear and anxiety over not having enough for the future controls your now.
- Your need to fill this barn up, then get a bigger barn and fill it up robs you of your happiness.
- You see, if your happiness depends on how much stuff you can cram into your barn – you will never have enough.

Think about every church potluck you’ve ever attended.

There are always people worried about not having enough and somehow there are always leftovers.

My friends, we can't ignore that, more often than not, we live with some abundance.

Compared with many parts of the world, the poorest Americans are pretty well-off.

God has blessed us beyond measure and most of us have more than we can use.

We have two choices:

1. We can build bigger barns...OR
2. We can decide that we will trust in the God who has blessed us so deeply; we can open our hearts, release our fears, and bless others as we have been blessed.

The choice is ours.

Friends, we don't need a bigger barn.

What we need is a bigger heart for God's work.

God will let us know when it's time to kick back and relax.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**