

A Barn Full  
Luke 12: 13-21

I just love the way this story opens don't you? I mean, what better way to tell a story about greed than to frame it in the context of 2 brothers trying to come to terms with an inheritance? If you had any doubts about Jesus knowing what it means to be human I think you can set those doubts aside. It's a story that also reminds me that things about us haven't changed all that much in 2,000 years.

I don't know about you but I think if you live long enough and you have siblings or relatives, at some point in your life you are going to be involved with the settlement of an estate, most likely your parents. And while I'm sure there are some that end amicably there are countless horror stories about how these things end and I could add my own to the mix. The prospect of receiving wealth or property can make people crazy if not downright sinful and greedy and can destroy relationships faster than a ride on the Titanic.

It reminds me of a story I heard about a 6th grade teacher who posed the following problem to her arithmetic classes:

"A wealthy man dies and leaves ten million dollars. One-fifth is to go to his wife; one-fifth is to go to his son, one-sixth to his butler, and the rest to charity. Now, what does each get?"

After a very long silence in the classroom, little Joey raised his hand.  
The teacher called on Joey for his answer.  
With complete sincerity in his voice, Joey answered, "A lawyer!"  
He's probably right. Where there is a will, there is often a lawsuit.

It's no wonder Jesus said "No way am I getting involved with this, I'm not your arbitrator!" But, being the great teacher that he was, he was not one to give answers anyway. He always wants us to work a little bit, maybe meet him halfway, that's what good teachers do. So he tells them a story, a parable.

This story of the rich fool who builds bigger barns to hold his increasing wealth is a powerful story, not only to those who heard it first, but to us today as well. It is certainly a commentary on the society in which Jesus lived and given our own penchant for hoarding and holding on to wealth it is a commentary on us as well. It is not however a commentary or judgement about money, but our attitudes towards the false security that it promises in comparison to the wealth that is given in our relationship to Jesus and God the Father.

It certainly has me asking questions about my life with wealth. There is a link on my *Lowes Life* web page that is titled, "My Wealth" which seems an appropriate title for today. It's a link that shows me how much money I've made working and what my investments would be, if I had any. Sometimes that is disappointing.

But that may not be the case with our rich fool today. He seems well satisfied with his endeavors and the blessings of wealth that have come his way. He's pretty sure that it has been his own doing that created that wealth, and he is not inclined to give God any credit or share his abundance with others. I think we can hear a parallel to our own culture in this story can't we?

There will be some wealthy people in our country who may not appreciate this story today. But Jesus' words still need to be considered even if you don't like them when he says, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." And we all have a lot of possessions don't we? I know I have. We live in a wealthy and prosperous country and most of us have more than we need. You may be the exception, but I highly doubt it. It certainly should make you consider, what is enough? How much more do we need? And do those things that we gather into our barns really satisfy us? Do

they feed our spirits and do they build up those whom we live in community with? Do they make us rich toward God? Jesus has been reminding us over and over again that relationship with God is that “One Thing!” The most important thing in our lives is this connection to God through Jesus.

A song that I remember singing when I was a fairly new Christian was a song called, *I'd Rather Have Jesus*. A song that shaped the career of the late George Beverly Shea. I haven't visited this song for a long time because it seemed kind of cheesy and old fashioned. But lately it seems to hit me right where I live and maybe it does for you too. Jesus desires for us to be in loving relationship with God. To live knowing that this is the most important and necessary part of our lives, something that can't be bought or saved up for, but something freely given; the deep and abiding love of God. What more could you possibly want for your life? What more could you possibly want to fill your spiritual barn with? And so these words don't seem so old fashioned to me now.

*I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold,  
I'd rather be His than have riches untold,  
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands,  
I'd rather be led by His nailed pierced hands.  
Than to be the king of a vast domain, or be held in sins dread sway.  
I'd rather have Jesus that anything this world affords today.*

*I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause,  
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause,  
I'd rather have Jesus than world-wide fame,  
I'd rather be true to his holy name.  
Than to be the king of a vast domain, or be held in sins dread sway.  
I'd rather have Jesus that anything this world affords today.*

And here is a third verse which I had never heard before;

*He's fairer than lilies of rarest bloom;  
He's sweeter than honey from out of the comb;  
He's all that my hungering spirit needs,  
I'd rather have Jesus and let Him lead.  
Than to be the king of a vast domain, or be held in sins dread sway.  
I'd rather have Jesus that anything this world affords today.*

This barn, which is a symbol today for your soul, can be filled with anything you choose to fill it with. Money, clothes, the latest gadgets, hatred, apathy, joy, forgiveness, the list is endless really. So I think it is important for us to take a moment and think about what is in your barn and how is that shaping your life? How is it making you, as Jesus said, “Rich toward God?”

The Reverend Peter Gnomes shared this from his sermon “*When Too Much Is Not Enough*.” He said, “The one who is rich toward God, Jesus says, is the one who recognizes here and now that treasure is not in what one has, or even in what one leaves or gives away, or even in what one does. Those are not riches. Treasure is in who one is, and ultimately that treasure is defined in terms of the relationship; one has with God. Treasure is knowing that one belongs not to self, or to work, or vocation, or ambition, but that one belongs to God.

You don't belong to your talent or to your skill or identity in the world. Treasure is knowing that you belong to God; treasure is knowing that therefore you are not alone. You are not isolated; you are not on your own.”

We belong to God and to each other. And perhaps the saddest part of this story is that the rich farmer seems to be alone. His wealth and prosperity have cut him off from the community. You can read here that there is no mention of anyone else, no friends, no relatives, no community of faith, just expressions of I and Me. This can often be the case when we are focused only on our own needs, building our own barns of security and wealth. We build our houses and make our investments. We put deadbolts on the doors and we live in isolation from our neighbors and community. I think we even enjoy that isolation until we are faced with a tragedy or a diagnosis of cancer or something equally challenging. Where is our help then?

I listened to an interview this week on NPR with Joshua Fields Millburn who along with co-author Ryan Nicodemus has produced a new film called, "Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things." The interviewer asked him to talk a bit about how he and Ryan got to this point in their lives and he shared this. He said, "Yeah, we both grew up really poor. Ryan in a trailer park, me on government assistance and sort of dysfunctional households, before that term dysfunctional was even in vogue, and we were discontented by the lack of money. And so throughout our 20s, we decided to work really hard, 60, 70, 80 hours a week climbing the corporate ladder and by my late 20s, I was living the American dream. I had the six-figure salary, the big house with more toilets than people and all the stuff to fill every corner of my consumer-driven lifestyle.

And I was really living the American dream, but then my mom died and my marriage ended both in the same month. And these two events forced me to look around and start to question what had become my life's focus. And when I realized I was so focused on so-called success and achievement and especially on the accumulation of stuff and, yeah, I was living the American dream, but it wasn't my dream. And it sort of took getting everything I ever wanted to realize that everything I ever wanted wasn't actually what I wanted at all." That's a powerful testimony isn't it?

There used to be a time in this country, and in certain places you can still find it, when building a barn was a community event. That all your neighbors, even those you may have disliked, gathered together to build a barn or maybe even a house. The wealth of the community was the source of strength and security for everyone. Maybe that is what the rich farmer forgot about. That as Ebenezer Scrooges old friend Jacob Marley told him, "Mankind was my business." Community is our business; God's business, is our business! That when we are blessed with wealth or other blessings we should be thinking of ways to bless others and not grab so tightly to our "STUFF."

The young man who asked the question this morning is probably going to let this legal matter regarding his father's estate become the thing that estranges him from his family and community. Harsh words will be spoken, greedy thoughts will be thought, jealousy and isolation is bound to occur and I hope Jesus' story changed his mind. We don't know what happened next. Maybe it will change our minds as well. Who knows? But what seems clear to me is that, if he doesn't change his mind he will miss the true treasure of being filled with God and sharing that treasure with others.

There was a wonderful little devotion that I read in my Alive Now magazine by Pastor David Rainey. It is titled "We Have This Treasure in Jelly Glasses" and I want to leave you with this today. It is based on a passage from 2 Corinthians about treasure in clay jars, and it struck me as a wonderful parallel to our reading today, because if we read on in this passage from Luke, Jesus concludes with that wonderful line, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

David shared it like this, "I grew up drinking out of "jelly glasses." Originally these glasses held grape or strawberry jelly from the grocery store, but my mom didn't throw them away when they were empty. They went on to hold other treasures—milk, juice, cold water on a hot day, iced tea. Jelly glasses weren't fancy as containers go, but they were highly valued in our modest home.

“we have this treasure in clay jars,” Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 4:7). What Paul had in mind were common pieces of pottery, inexpensive and utilitarian, employed for many purposes in the ancient world. Those jars might have been plain on the outside, perhaps chipped or cracked from use, but they were invaluable for holding what was precious for life—water, wine, oil for cooking, fuel for light.

Paul was painfully aware of his own limitations and imperfections as a human being and disciple. He was, he confessed, just a “clay jar.” But what a joy to think of being held lovingly in the hands of God and used to carry the treasure of God’s love to others.

Like Paul, you and I are just clay jars, everyday jelly glasses, but we too, are treasured vessels in the hands of God. And we carry treasure: the good news of unconditional love for those who feel unlovable, the message of forgiveness for those who feel condemned, the joy of purpose for those who feel discarded. We are just jelly glasses, but how treasured we are, and what a treasure we hold.” (David Rainey is a retired UMC minister and lives in Nashville TN)

Our barns, our lives, our spirits, are filled with the treasure of God’s love and forgiveness. And God means for us to take that treasure and share it liberally with and in the communities that we find ourselves planted. So do not lock up your love and compassion and talents in your big barn, but fling the doors open and let it out in a flood of extravagant love and joy, giving God the Glory. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let us pray

Gracious God and Giver of every good thing, help us to depend on you for our daily bread. Let us look to you and the things that you love, and not on the false treasures the world has to offer us. let us seek you first, and your righteousness, forsaking all else, so that the world grows strangely dim. Let us lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, where the moth does not destroy and the thief does not steal. Free us from the ties that bind us to worldly possessions, and allow us to focus on those things that will last. Keep us from the lusts of pleasure and the pursuit of unhealthy happiness; let us realize that these are but a chasing after the wind. Help us instead pursue what you love, what you treasure, knowing that wherever our treasure is, our heart will follow. Amen. By Angie Garrett