

Sermon: Rev Susanna Pain
5/8/07 Luke 12:13-21

Imagine that you are being taken to a desert island. You are allowed to take five things including one luxury item. (a bible and complete works of Shakespeare is already provided) Five things! What would you take?

What would you take off the top of your head – 5 things?

Or, if you knew that today was the last day of your life, how would you spend your time? (What do you value?)

*“How can I give you up?” says God.
How can I abandon you?
I, the Holy one, am with you...*

What is important?

*How can I give you up?
How can I abandon you?
How could I ever destroy you?*

*I will not punish you in my anger.
My heart will not let me do it.
My love of you is too strong.
I, the Holy One, am with you...*

Contrast this with the young man:

‘Jesus, tell my brother to give me my share of the inheritance...

And the fool in the story:

‘There was a rich man who had plenty...

He pulled down his barns and built bigger ones.’

The mentality is ‘it is all about me!’

The young man and the rich fool are so tied up in themselves they can’t see the riches beyond - the riches of generosity and relationship.

*How can I give you up? Says God
How can I abandon you?
I the Holy One am with you. What a contrast.*

Bernard Scott entitles this parable of the rich fool ‘How to mismanage a miracle’.

Scott suggests that the typical Jew in Jesus’ day on hearing this parable would have thought of Joseph’s efforts to store up food during the seven years of lack. The average Jew, Scott contends, would have been shocked by the actions of the man in the parable. The miracle of the man’s abundance

was given for the benefit of the people who would need it, not for the benefit of the man himself.

I don't remember which church father said it, but, "The rich man already has plenty of room to store his crops in the mouths of the poor." – or something like that.

How do we view and use the things in our possession? Where is true meaning and purpose in life to be found?

. "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

These words from on high give us pause. But we soon tell ourselves, again, that it's demoralising to live as if we're going to die "this very night." We have to take chances.

But what if Jesus is pointing out something more sinister, more inevitable? What if, rather than pointing out something that might happen, Jesus is pointing out something that will happen? What if it wasn't God demanding the rich man's life? Notice that God's doesn't say, "This very night I demand your life of you." What if, instead of God, the rich man's barns are demanding his life?

How can the rich man's barns demand his life? Whether it's hoarding for tomorrow or having it all today, filling, maintaining, and protecting our barns is demanding work.

An abundance of possessions can end up demanding our whole life. The big house never really becomes a home because we're never there but always at work. Our kids have everything, except time to be together as a family. In our most significant relationships, we get so caught up in keeping up that we lose track of intimacy and the delight in one another that brought us together. Our work becomes no longer a calling or a vocation, just a way to make money. We no longer know, let alone like, who we are. That is how our life is lost to the demands of our barns.

Jesus' parable and God's pronouncement aren't a judgement but a warning. "Take care!" Jesus says, "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life doesn't consist in the abundance of possessions" (12:15). "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (12:20)

When we attempt to find life by enslaving ourselves to our possessions, we wind up dead – not because God turns God's back on us but because we empty ourselves of all the real life that God gives. On the cross Jesus gave the world real life. In his resurrection Jesus made that life eternal. In baptism Jesus gave this new and eternal life to us.

The challenge here isn't to abandon our barns or to give away our goods. It's harder than that: it is to trust our security – our future and the quality of our life today – to the life that God in Christ gives and not to our stock portfolios, our retirement plans and all the stuff that we need to live. We need to plan for tomorrow, yes. We also need to have faith for tomorrow.

The older we get, the harder this parable gets because we do worry about the future. Still Jesus reminds us that our future can't be secure by building bigger barns where we store up more for ourselves. Those barns will end up demanding our life and leaving us empty. Will we who hear this parable receive God's involvement as an abrasive interruption of our plans – as the Rich Fool did – or will we invite God in with trust and openness? (The Rich Fool by Craig A Satterlee – from The Lutheran, June 2004 found on the internet)

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In his book, **Jesus and the New Age**, Frederick W Danker writes on this text: *"In 1923, a group of the world's most successful men met at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago. Assembled there were: the president of the largest steel corporation in America; the greatest wheat speculator; a man who was to be president of the New York Stock Exchange; a member of the President's cabinet; the canniest investor on Wall Street; a future director the World Bank for International Settlements; and the head of the world's largest monopoly. A few years later, this was their fate: Charles Schwab died in debt; Arthur Cutten died abroad in obscurity; Richard Whitney did time in Sing Sing prison and was blotted out of Who's Who; Albert Fall was pardoned from prison in order that he could die at home; Jesse Livermore, Leon Fraser and Ivar Kreuger, the match king, all committed suicide,..... All of these people learned how to make money; none of them learned how to live. All the bulls became lambs, and Schwab's bleating in 1930 was the most pitiful of all: "I'm afraid; every man is afraid. I don't know, we don't know, whether the values we have are going to be real next month or not."*

At the peak of these men's lives, they were on the top of the hill in American life. They knew how to make a living, but they didn't know how to live. None of them were very happy.

I suspect that Jesus would have said to these men the same thing that he said to the young man: "Be careful, keep your guard up against all kinds of greed, for life does not consist in the accumulation of treasures."

Let me end with the story of someone with different values: Laurence, deacon, martyr who died in 258AD.

Laurence was one of seven deacons of the congregation at Rome, and, like the deacons appointed in Acts, was responsible for financial matters in the church and for the care of the poor. Laurence lived during a time of persecution under the emperor Valerian. The emperor demanded that Lawrence surrender the treasures of the church. Lawrence gathered lepers, orphans, the blind and lame. He brought them to the emperor and said, "Here is the treasure of the church." This act enraged the emperor, and Lawrence

was sentenced to death. Lawrence's martyrdom was one of the first to be observed by the church.

True riches are found not in abundance of possessions but in serving others.

What is foolish about the man is not that he adds to his holdings and develops plans for taking care of them, but rather that in doing so he forgets everything else. He forgets above all his own mortality and the wisdom that reflection on it could bring.

He forgets his relationship with God and with others.
