

Sermon on Greed Luke 12:13-21

It's not unusual after a service for someone to mention that they liked the sermon. This is good to hear as it takes so long to write them, and hearing this makes it feel it's been worthwhile. When someone says they liked it, I always ask what in the sermon particularly touched them, and hope I'll be able to field any theological or Biblical issues when they respond. Almost always the reply is the same: oh no I just loved listening to your accent.

In today's gospel Jesus has been teaching important spiritual wisdom to the gathered followers in a compelling sermon, much as in Matthew's gospel we hear about his compelling Sermon on The Mount. He has just finished giving an important set of instructions and advice to the disciples about how they are to rely on the Holy Spirit when they face opposition. So we might imagine there would be some follow up about the impact his sermon made on the listeners that day.

And it was maybe understandable that he was a bit irritated when a stranger from the crowd ignores what he's just preached so eloquently and instead shouts out "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." and he gets a short response from Jesus, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?"

Preaching eruditely on the fruit of the Spirit hardly merited a question on how to do estate planning. It came from someone who hadn't really been listening to Jesus discourse on spirituality and instead had been ruminating on his financial woes, and jumped in when there was a lull with this inheritance question. Jesus was not pleased at this interruption but He recognized what was going on here, and so turns His teaching to the subject of greed, and preoccupation on temporal things. "And he said to them, *Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.*"

And from this Jesus creates an opportunity for a short, rather unusual parable.

Usually Jesus' parables illustrate some aspect of The Kingdom, of grace, of salvation.

But this parable has as its only character a secular figure with no spiritual connection whatever.

But this secularity and complete isolation of the rich man is what delivers this parable's punch. This man is completely out there on his own, doing his own thing with no reference to anything or anyone else. He is, Jesus says pointedly, a "fool." In the Bible context a fool was anyone who fails to notice how the world works, who doesn't get it, doesn't pay attention to how good sense works. Fools are also unteachable, and they refuse to listen when others point these things out to them.

Think of the term *fool's paradise* which means someone who lives in a world of their own and preoccupation, becoming more and more isolated as time goes by, blinkered about the consequences of their actions and becoming an island unto themselves.

Psalm 14 reflects on foolishness "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" In Biblical times when the psalms were written, people did not mean there is no God in the modern Atheistic sense that no God exists anywhere. They meant *there is no God HERE. And what I do, say, and think, is not in any sense in any kingdom of God.*

The sin of this rich man in Luke 12 is that he has isolated himself from his fellow humanity, from the larger community, from God himself. He is interested only in himself and is not interested in sharing anything with anyone else or those with less. These exist beyond his consciousness.

The man's failure is, that not only did he fail to be aware of God, but he also was oblivious of all reminders of God's presence, and signals to live relating to his neighbors, whoever they are and their needs, reaching out and sharing with them all he had, according to God's holy law: *Inasmuch you do it to one of the least of them, you do it to me.*

The rich man then had no sense of God and had no spiritual consciousness. He just wanted to build bigger and bigger barns in which to store his increasing wealth through abundant harvests.

It's significant that in this parable Jesus makes the rich man wealthy through his accumulation of grain, the stuff that becomes the staff of life. He wanted to store all that grain away for himself, far more than he would ever need, but would hoard it rather than share it with others.

We hear God's question posed by Jesus: *This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?*

So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves, but are not rich toward God.

***Who will get all that wealth he has stored up for himself when he's gone?* Possibly it will be distributed to feed people he never noticed or cared about when he lived, but not in an heroic intentional way, as if he'd done it when alive. It needs the fool to wake up to the call, to recognize what's possible if we set our spiritual sights to the way Christ was teaching - being rich in our relationship with God**

How do treasures get stored up in our own times, how do we get a right relationship with temporal things, and live lives abundant through sharing what we have to care for others? That's what Jesus asks us to consider.

The parable of the rich man echoes the OT reading today. The famous words from Ecclesiastes: *Vanity, of vanities All is vanity.* Meaning that we do well to look beyond life's transient temporal preoccupations. Everything under the sun we spend our lives pursuing is transient, fleeting, momentary, temporary. Work devoted to gaining possessions will be left behind, all swept away as if by the wind, because in time the world will continue marching on without us. Our possessions will be left behind. Even our memory will die with our friends and family. And the world will continue marching on without us, whoever we are. Remember the old adage – you can't take it with you.

Therefore we look to God to give some deeper meaning to our lives. While we live to give out what we can, where we can, to whoever, in ways that meet their needs.

I always remember when growing up there was a violent earthquake in Italy. Entire villages and towns were destroyed and people lost everything. It was winter time and reports came through of the need for sending aid to provide warmth for the people who were living outside and in tents, their homes destroyed. A national campaign was launched all over Europe to donate warm winter clothing, for Italian families shown huddling together for warmth in desecrated villages. Schools, churches and clothes manufacturers collected vast donations of clothing and it was urgently sent out to the Italians destitute and suffering in the cold. How appreciative they would be we thought of the lovely woolen sweaters and blankets and coats we had sent out. News reports came through on TV, a week or so later. There were piles of black bags full of clothes being made into bonfires around which the displaced people were warming themselves. The urgent need for immediate heat in the winter climate being a greater need than sorting through clothes.

What we hear in today's scriptures is that for our earthly life to make sense we need to have a living faith in God. And to make what we have in our lives matter in our relationships with God, giving perspective and meaning.

Solomon asks *for whom and for what are we living?* St Paul, writing to the Colossians, seems to answer *If you were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God, So set your mind on things above, not on things on earth.* And in our quest for all we do to have value and perspective, let's determine to be a light to shine for others in all we do, resist the drive to build bigger barns, and keep our minds set on things bringing us closer to God's purpose. AMEN