

8-3-24 Sermon: “We Have Enough” – Luke 12:13-25, 29-31

At first reading, the parable of the rich fool is a little too simple. A man is rich and gets richer, so he builds bigger barns to store his crops. But God comes to him and says, “You fool – you will die this very night, and all your possessions will come to nothing.” The man dies...the end. Moral of the story: Don’t be greedy, because you can’t take it with you.

This parable is so simple that it’s easy to make the rich fool into a caricature of himself. We call this man materialistic, unjust, even evil. He idolizes money; he doesn’t share; maybe he even mistreats his workers. He is Ebenezer Scrooge without his Christmas ghosts – the man with all the money in the world who dies alone and miserable because he misses what really matters. The rich fool gets what’s coming to him, and we all go home edified and chastened by his story.

And that *may* be what Jesus is going for here. But those of y’all who have been studying parables in Bible study know that they are usually a little more complex than that, right? The thing is, Jesus never actually says that this man is evil or unjust – just that he is foolish. So I wonder...what is it that makes the rich fool foolish? Where does the rich fool go wrong?

I *don’t* think the rich fool is foolish because he stores and saves his crops. Saving for the future is not foolish; it is wise! It’s good financial sense; this year the land produced, next year it may not. Agricultural life is a cycle of feast and famine, and those who are wise will save when there is plenty.

Nor do I think the rich fool is foolish because he wants to kick back and relax. To eat, drink, and be merry is not a bad thing: the Bible is full of occasions for feasting, and Jesus himself famously prolongs a party by turning water into wine. The rich fool makes no plans to run off and squander his fortune in Vegas; he just wants to rest and enjoy his final years. That’s what we all want to do at the end of our lives, right? It’s called retirement! And who among us hasn’t saved up our riches for that?

In some ways, this rich fool is not so different from you or from me. He might have more money than we do, but that in itself does not make him evil or wrong. We don’t have to make him a caricature; we could give him the benefit of the doubt and say he’s an old guy who’s done well for himself and is ready to retire.

Which brings us back to the question: What makes the rich fool foolish?

I think the rich fool’s problem may have less to do with money and more to do with...pronouns. Yes, pronouns; it’s a very modern problem, really. And this man’s problem is that his preferred pronouns are “I, me, and my.”

Those are the only pronouns the rich fool uses in his monologue – I, me, and my. (Well, one time he says “you,” but he’s talking to himself!) The rich fool has only one conversation partner – the only person he talks to or thinks about is himself. He mentions no family, friends, or neighbors with whom to enjoy his abundant harvest. And as God not-so-delicately points out, he has no one to leave his fortune to after he dies. The rich fool is isolated; he has no community. He lives for himself and himself alone.

At the end of the parable, Jesus warns his listeners not to be like the rich fool, who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich toward God. And the problematic word in that sentence, it turns out, is not treasure, but *himself*.

The law of Moses, which governs Jesus’ Jewish community, is clear on this. There will always be rich people, and there will always be poor ones. So in situations of economic disparity, it is the responsibility of the rich to take care of the poor, to make sure that everyone in the community has *enough*.

To be rich toward God is to be rich...in relationship. To notice one another. To practice interdependence – when I have extra, I share it with you, and when you have too much, you share it with me, and in the end we all come out ok.

Were he rich toward God, the rich fool might have shared some of his abundant harvest with his neighbors instead of building bigger barns. He might have hosted a meal for the community rather than feasting all alone. The rich fool's wealth is not a sin; it is an opportunity. An opportunity to participate in God's economy. An opportunity to shift his pronouns from *I* and *my* to *we* and *ours*. Because the bottom line in God's economy is this: *We* have enough.

We have enough. Not always as individuals – sometimes we have too little, and sometimes we have too much. But we, together, as a community, have all that we need.

As many of you know, I am in the middle of a multi-year medical process. And it costs a bit of money, as multi-year medical processes tend to do. I make a fairly fixed income (talk to Personnel & Budget Committees, they're trying to rectify that!) and I knew from the outset that these treatments weren't going to fit in my normal budget. So I went and got a chunk of money out of savings to help pay.

But over the past 2 ½ years, something fascinating has happened. I have slowly been working my way through that money, sure, but the numbers don't quite line up. Mathematically speaking, right now I should be nearing the end of the money I withdrew...but I'm not. There's still a fair amount left.

Lest you think this is some sort of multiplication miracle or me being really good at budgeting, let me assure you – it's not! It's a result of something bigger...a community...a "we." Friends Venmo-ing me 20 bucks with a note that says, "Happy birthday, good luck, make a baby." Or family members who won't let me pay for lunch, saying instead, "Put it toward the baby." Friends and neighbors insisting on paying me for help I have offered for free. It's many of *you* saying, "Hey, come for dinner; and here, take some leftovers home for tomorrow."

I'll tell you, it's a humbling and deeply powerful experience, being on the receiving end of a "we." It makes me hope to be on the giving end again one day. Because the math is clear: I, as a lone individual, do *not* have enough for this process. But in gospel metrics, there is no such thing as "I as a lone individual." I am – you are, all of us – are part of a "we," a community, a group of people seeking together the Kingdom of God. And we, together, have enough.

This is what the rich man misses. He's not evil; he's foolish. He's isolated. He has lost connection with his village, his community, those with whom he could share his wealth. Those who could offer him invaluable resources in return, services without a price tag, relationships worth more than money could buy.

In a few moments, our congregation will receive four new members. Four people who want to officially become part of this community of faith, of this particular group of disciples seeking God's Kingdom together. And we will welcome them – and welcome one another.

Friends, it is *good* to do life together, in community. So friends, members, new and old alike: Welcome to the "we."