

The Parable of the Rich Fool — Rev. Denise Stone

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Today's is one of those texts that preachers are uncomfortable with because it means talking about money. Even if that isn't the focus of the sermon, it is most definitely an element. And that has the potential to make pastors and church members uncomfortable.

With this passage it is possible to talk about preparing for the future, and to talk about greed, we can talk about responsibilities and obligation, and we can definitely talk about God and our commitment to following God and serving one another. There is a lot of potential sermons packed in these few verses.

If we back up to the beginning of the chapter, we learn that while Jesus is teaching his disciples, there is also a very large crowd that has formed and are listening and learning from Jesus.

In the preceding passage, Jesus is teaching about persecution of his followers and how the Holy Spirit will provide to them the words to say when they are questioned.

Then seemingly out of nowhere a guy in the crowd speaks up and asks Jesus to settle a financial dispute over inheritance between him and his brother. This

guy wants to suck Jesus into a legal dispute, hoping to use Jesus' perceived authority to weigh in on his side. Jesus does not take the bait.

What Jesus does is use this as a teaching opportunity about greed and the problems of a life of self-centeredness. After first addressing the man and telling him that he is not the arbitrator of the dispute, Jesus turns to his disciples and the crowd of people and in verse 15 says, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

Jesus then tells a story, a parable about a Rich Fool. There is a wealthy landowner who has had the fortune of an unexpected bumper crop. So impressive is the yield that the man's barns aren't big enough to hold it all. So, rather than risk losing any of his producing farmland, he decides to tear down the existing barns and build bigger ones.

In verse 19 the man continues and tells himself, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."

God, however, intrudes on the man's self-conversation, telling the man, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

Jesus ends the parable and this passage with the conclusion, "So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Ouch!

What is wrong with preparing for the future? What is wrong with putting aside the extra so that we have less to worry about? The simple answer is there is nothing wrong with those things.

This parable does not tell us to quit investing in our 401Ks. This parable does not tell us to stop putting some of our paycheck into savings accounts. This parable is not about stopping providing for our families.

This parable is completely about the sin of only thinking of ourselves.

Pastor David Lose wrote a commentary article that pointed out the two problems inherent with the Rich Fool of this parable,

First, notice the farmer's consistent focus throughout the conversation he has with himself: "What should *I* do, for *I* have no place to store *my* crops?" Then he said, "*I* will do this: *I* will pull down *my* barns and build larger

ones, and there / will store all *my* grain and *my* goods. And / will say to *my* soul...."

The relentless use of the first person pronouns "I" and "my" betray a preoccupation with self. There is no thought to using the abundance to help others, no expression of gratitude for his good fortune, no recognition of God at all. The farmer has fallen prey to worshiping the most popular of gods: the Unholy Trinity of "me, myself, and I." This leads to, and is most likely caused by, a second mistake. He is not foolish because he makes provision *for* the future; he is foolish because he believes that by his wealth he can *secure* his future...ⁱ

That is what Jesus is talking about in the last verse of this passage when he warns against being "those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Nothing we have is really ours. Every blessing we have and experience are given to us by God. The man in the parable forgot this. He became so self-focused that he missed the bigger picture.

Scripture repeatedly tells us to care for the less fortunate. A popular refrain of the Old Testament is

that we are to care for the widows, the orphans and the strangers in our land. When we neglect to do those things, when we neglect to care for others, we are missing how God intends for us to bless others out of our own blessings.

Do you wonder, even a little, if our society struggles with what to do with our blessings from God? Author Anna Macdonald in a blog this week said,

Something like 1 in 11 Americans pays for storage units, hoarding disorder is an official mental health diagnosis as of 2013, and doomsday preppers (a specialized subset of hoarders?) are featured on Netflix. Our access and attachment to stuff has pushed the pendulum so far that we are seeing good old capitalist reaction: people develop and profit off of methods like KonMari (Marie Kondo), which advise you on how to systematically purge things.ⁱⁱ

As a society, we are obsessed with stuff and getting more stuff. And that weighs us down rather than lifts us up. It is greed and greed is idolatry.

Professor of New Testament, Matthew Skinner suggests that

Greed shows its true identity as idolatry when Jesus says over and over again in Luke that we must beware of what money can do to us (see Luke 12:33-34; 16:13;). Greed compels us to banish anyone who looks like they might threaten “what’s ours.” Likewise, idolatry constructs worldviews in which self-interest is the cardinal virtue.... Idolatry makes fools of us all when it convinces us to create religious justifications for our arrogance and hardheartedness.ⁱⁱⁱ

What does this mean for you and I? It means that we need to have our priorities aligned to God’s. It means that we cannot allow the “stuff” to get in the way of our faith and our love for God and for one another. It means that there is more to life than what we make or do. Preparing for the future is not wrong. Preparing for the future without regard to God and to others is.

Pastor Love that I referenced before suggested that “the question to put to [you and to me] is not, “Is material abundance bad?” but rather, “Is our material abundance sufficient to meet the weight of meaning, significance, and joy that we seek?”^{iv}

The answer to that is no. Stuff will never satisfy us down deep. Only God can do that. And it is that same God who wants to meet us this morning. So, in a few

moments we come to the Table of Communion, the Lord's Table.

Communion reminds us that our lives do not belong to us. Communion reminds us that Jesus gave his life so that we could have life, and life abundantly. That is so much more important than anything we can own or accumulate.

Let us seek the true treasure that is Jesus Christ and meet with God this morning.

ⁱ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=720

ⁱⁱ <http://www.ekklesiaproject.org/blog/2019/07/rich-towards-god/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5368>

^{iv} https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=720