

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"The Rich Fool"

Scripture: Luke 12:13-34, Psalm 51:15-17

Opening Hymn: God is here! As we your people meet 799 (1-3)

Communion Hymn: Behold the Lamb (Communion Hymn)

Closing Hymn: Great is thy faithfulness 324 (1,3) or Now thank we all our God 457

Children's/Baptism: The Lord bless you 619

Choruses: Seek ye first 625, 10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord), one more...

Communion Sunday & Baptism

September 2, 2018

Many of us worry about not having enough.

You see this in how we live.

Just consider that young couple.

He has taken on side projects.

She is working extra shifts.

They are burning the candle at both ends

So they can keep up with the bills

And put a down-payment on the new house.

Or consider the middle-aged bachelor.

He does well-paid work that adequately covers

his mortgage, his expenses, even the high-end food

he buys for his dogs.

And yet he is looking at his stocks each evening.

Buying, selling, trading.

He is eager to build a bigger portfolio, a larger nest-egg.

Or consider the retired couple,

Who recently moved into a senior's home.

When they looked over their finances

they knew they could do it.

But now they wince at each month's invoice
And are now closely watching every penny.
They are worried they are going to run out.

We all worry about having enough.

We do our best to grab all we can
And hold on to all we can
In the hopes that one day we will feel secure.

We are like those game show contestants
In a cube with money flying around,
Anxiously grab bills and hang on to them
Before the buzzer goes off.

But will more money make us less anxious?
Many of you have probably heard of the Rockefellers.

"John D. Rockefeller... started Standard Oil...
[And at his peak he controlled 90% of the oil in the USA.]

Considering he was a billionaire in the early 1900's
he is still considered... the richest person in modern history.

When a reporter asked [Rockefeller], "How much money is enough?"
[Rockefeller] responded, "Just a little bit more."ⁱ

PAUSE

How about that: the richest person in modern history
Still felt he needed a bit more.

In today's Gospel lesson a man asks Jesus
To arbitrate over his dad's estate.

Now it was practice in Jesus' time to retain united ownership
Of the family farm, after the death of the patriarch.

What seems obvious from the request
Is that one brother wants to have independent possession
Of the property.ⁱⁱ

He doesn't want to be in business with his brother.
He wants some or maybe all of the property for his own.

Jesus responds to the request:
"Mister, what makes you think it's any of my business
to be a... mediator for you?"ⁱⁱⁱ

Then Jesus warns his listeners:
"Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed.
Life is not defined by what you have,
even when you have a lot."^{iv}

Then he tells them story:
"The farm of a certain rich man produced a [bumper] crop.
He talked to himself: 'What can I do?
My barn isn't big enough for this harvest.'

Then he said, 'Here's what I'll do:
I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones.
Then I'll gather in all my grain and goods,
and I'll say to myself, Self, you've done well!

You've got it made and can now retire.

Take it easy and have the time of your life!"^v

[Now this all sounds pretty reasonable, pretty conventional.

Until God himself enters the story...

And this is the only time God speaks in Jesus' parables.^{vi]}

"Just then God showed up and said,

'Fool! Tonight you die.

And your barnful of goods—who gets it?'

"That's what happens when you fill your barn with Self
and not with God." [Jesus warns.]^{vii}

PAUSE

So what makes this rich man a fool?

I mean Scripture endorses wisdom and stewardship.

What does Joseph tell Pharaoh to do,

after Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream,

a dream that speaks about years of abundance
followed by years of drought?

"Build bigger barns!" Joseph advises.

And it's not as if Scripture speaks against enjoyment of God's blessings.

When Jesus shows up at that wedding in Cana

he makes enough wine

to keep the celebration going for weeks!

What makes this rich man a fool,
Isn't his industry.

What makes this rich man a fool
Isn't his desire to relax and enjoy life in the future.

What makes this man a fool
Is that he fails to recognize God.
He offers no praise, no thanksgiving
for the favor God has shown him.

What makes this man a fool
Is that he expresses no concern for others.
Just look at the language, all the 'I's in the story.
"I will tear down... I will store... I'll say to myself..."
The only person he is thinking of is himself.

Above all what makes this rich man a fool
Is that he thinks he can "write his own story".
He thinks that the accumulation of wealth
Will "give him control over the future".^{viii}

The reality, which he discovers too late,
Is that "wealth cannot give the security people expect from it,
because [wealth] is impotent
in the face of the most basic uncertainties of life."^{ix}

You put in extra hours working towards a down-payment
And then your spouse gets a debilitating illness.
You can create a vast portfolio of stocks
and then the entire market takes a dive.

You can manage your savings so well
 you can live at the Four Seasons till you're 100.
 But then you step off the curb and get hit by a cab.

So what are we supposed to do
 When we can't control the world around us?
 Consign ourselves to binge-watching reruns
 As we anxiously wait for our world to collapse.

Jesus teaches the opposite.
 He wants us to be busy, but busy for God's kingdom.
 He encourages us to not worry about our lives.
 He tells us that God will take care of us.

Jesus points to the ravens and the wildflowers
 As examples of God's provident care for creation.

"And how more valuable you are than the birds!"
 Jesus declares.^x

PAUSE

I wonder how that parable might have ended
 If that rich man trusted in God's care
 and focused on God's kingdom?

What else might he have done
 When he saw that bumper crop?

There might have been thanksgiving:
 A recognition that this blessing had come from God's hand.

There might have been some sharing:
A party for the entire neighborhood
To celebrate the goodness God has shown.

There would certainly be less rush
To put up bigger barns.
I mean, he might have added another bin or two
But he would certainly be less anxious
about conserving every last grain of wheat.

He would know in his heart
That God would provide more.

How about us?
Any bumper crops recently?
Maybe we are simply reaping those 'ordinary' blessings
Of life in a safe and prosperous community.

Given our status
We'd be wise to consider the warning
Offered by the rich fool and others like him.

But I think it is even more important,
to consider Jesus' gracious promise
that God will indeed care for us.

When this Good News penetrates our heart
We will be able to resist the both allure of wealth
And the fear of scarcity.

PAUSE

That young couple will be able to turn down shifts
 And enjoy a holiday weekend
 trusting that God is providing for their family
 (even if that house might be smaller).

That middle-aged bachelor will be able to forget about the markets
 And spend some time listening to his elderly neighbor
 Trusting that in God's eyes this is a most worthy investment.

The retired couple will be able to thank God,
 not curse God, for their longevity
 enjoy their present comforts,
 and dare to write more checks
 to support good projects in their community.

Because both young and old they are starting to learn
 That God will care for those God loves.

Well may God's good promises penetrate our hearts.
 And may we respond with generosity and gratitude.

Amen and amen.

ⁱ "Just A Little Bit More" <https://starwinar.wordpress.com/daily-short-story/just-a-little-bit-more/>

ⁱⁱ See Richard Bauckham "Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year C; Luke 12:32-40" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels* 380.

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 12:14 MSG

^{iv} Luke 12:15 MSG

^v Luke 12:16-19 MSG

^{vi} Richard Bauckham "Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year C; Luke 12:32-40" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels* 381

^{vii} Luke 12:20-21 MSG

^{viii} Richard Bauckham "Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year C; Luke 12:32-40" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels* 381

^{ix} *Ibid* 382

^x Luke 12:24