

Sermon 4th August 2013
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Rich in God's Sight

Jesus tells a parable that is often called the Parable of the Rich Fool.

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The truth is there's nothing wrong with saving for a rainy day. The foolishness of this man isn't in his plan to build bigger barns. His spiritual illness isn't inherently about his wealth or even his ambition – it's in how he relates to it.

Notice the inner dialogue this man has with himself:

“What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops? I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’”

Here is part of this man's spiritual illness: He is all about the unholy trinity of me, myself, and I. There are no references at all to others– not to family or friends, and certainly no references to God. He is under the mistaken belief that all this wealth is his: his possession, his to control, and that he alone produced this wealth.

I have a coffee mug at home that has the saying on it. Whoever dies with the most toys wins! It is as if we can accumulate enough stuff to fill an inner void,

- Modern day photos; digital cameras, we can take and store more photos now than every before in history, and we get ever bigger hard drives to hold them all. Yet all the photos in the world will not make us immortal.

In his 1987 film "Wall Street," director Oliver Stone created an icon of excess with the character Gordon Gekko. Gekko was a rapacious corporate raider played by Michael Douglas, who won an Oscar for best actor for his performance. Twenty-five years later people still remember Gekko's address to the Teldar Paper stockholders:

"The point is, ladies and gentleman, that greed — for lack of a better word — is good.

Greed is right.

Greed works.

Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary

spirit.

Greed, in all of its forms — greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge — has marked the upward surge of mankind.

The other delusion that distorts this man's relationship with his wealth is uncovered when God addresses him: "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

In the face of the stark reality of death, the truth is revealed: No amount of wealth or possessions can save you from your own mortality. Your possessions will not save you.

On one level, we all know our wealth won't save us. We tend to know this in our heads, but often our hearts don't believe it. We are anxious about money – anxious about our jobs, making the mortgage payments, fearful that our cars will die on us, worried our refrigerators will give out – all of which make us nervous about money. But notice all these anxieties are focused on the self, and this myopic, internal focus becomes the basis of the fear in our hearts.

As Christians, we are called to shift our focus away from the small, egocentric self and outward into a radical trust in God.

The reading from Luke today is set in the midst of Luke's sermon on the plain, and this very passage is immediately followed by the one where Jesus invites his hearers to not worry about tomorrow ...

But Jesus doesn't just step in, look over the details and make a ruling does he? As we see so many times in the stories of Jesus, there is an attempt to drag him into a conflict on one side or the other and Jesus not only refuses to be drawn in but he responds in a way that challenges everybody involved to step back and look at the whole thing from another angle so that a way of reconciliation might be found. Because one thing is sure in this, if this bloke got a rabbi to resolve the thing there would be no reconciliation with his brother.

It would have been a bit like a woman and her son in America a couple of years ago who after ten years putting in \$20 each to buy tickets in the state lottery each week actually won a \$4.2 million payout. But the son immediately claimed that he'd bought that ticket with his own money, so the mother, who said that their relationship had previously been "loving and close" sued him for her half. "Teacher, tell my son to divide the family winnings with me!" Once you bring in the lawyers to resolve a family dispute, you might win the dispute but you're unlikely to

still have a family.

Remember the original context. Somebody comes to Jesus with a family conflict over money. Their wealth was more important to them than their family relationship. Jesus knew that his wealth was keeping him from happiness and from what was really important and so he told a parable warning him of his foolishness.

We learn the essential lesson: do not attempt to possess things, for things cannot really be possessed. Only make sure you are not possessed by them, lest your god change. And from this lesson, two resulting truths emerge from our peripheral vision. First: Our loyalties indicate where we are searching. And second: Our loyalties indicate what kind of life possesses us.

In Jesus' day to be rich was valued, but to be rich without family or close relationships was seen as a ludicrous waste and a pitiful condition. Having crippled ourselves with a consumer culture of covetousness - work, shop, get more stuff, die - we are now seeing what goes on when we structure the institutions of our society on the same principles we've been living by. We find they become as sick and friendless and dysfunctional as the people running them.

And now for some good news.

Japan benefactor sends winning lottery ticket to flood victims

TOKYO (AFP) Jul 24, 2004

An anonymous benefactor sent a winning lottery ticket worth 200 million yen (1.8 million dollars) to a local government in central Japan to help disaster victims of heavy rain, the governor said Saturday.

"I would like to use this press conference to say 'Thank you very much,'" Issei Nishikawa, governor of Fukui prefecture, some 300 kilometres (190 miles) west of Tokyo, told a news conference.

The ticket, confirmed by authorities to be a real winner, came with a letter from the nameless donor.

"If this can help even a little those who have met with unhappiness and disaster, I would be very happy," the writer said in the letter dated Thursday.

Michael Leunig parable: How to pay your way and stand on your feet.

What Jesus is doing here is inviting his hearers into a life greater than our anxious fears, a life where what is true and strong and loving has greater value than things that have no ultimate worth. I cannot help but compare this with what the Australian Government is doing on our behalf, to asylum seekers. With the policy of sending all boat travelling asylum seekers to New Guinea, he is saying, on our behalf, Australia is a rich nation, and we need to preserve our wealth. With this refugee policy, we are invited to live as a nation in fear of the stranger in need, as a nation in fear of sharing our wealth, and as a nation whose economic wealth is placed far above our spiritual wealth.

As Christians, I believe Jesus calls us to live a different sort of life to this; A life open and vulnerable to the needs of others. A Life where our wealth becomes an invitation to share. We are invited into deeper relationship with God and with others – a treasure far greater and more enduring. Jesus said, “I have come that you might have life, and have it abundantly.” Jesus came to reconnect you with the sources of life, with love, with hope, with care, with joy, with the very God of life.

Blessings

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O Great Spirit ...

Roll away from me the weight of dead and frozen thoughts.

Clear away from me the fogs of falsely sweet illusions.

Ignite in my heart the warmth of true love

That with my new eyes of new love

And my angel at my back

I may see the Truth of the World

I may feel the Beauty of the World.

And I may act with courage for the good

David Tresemer