

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23 Colossians 3:1-11 Luke 12:13-21

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

A little movie trivia to wake us up this morning ... I'll give you a memorable quote; you tell me the movie: "I've a feeling we're not in Kansas any more." (*The Wizard of Oz*—Judy Garland to little Toto.) "We'll always have Paris." (*Casablanca*—Humphrey Bogart to Ingrid Bergman). "Momma always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get." (*Forrest Gump*—Tom Hanks to a stranger at the bus stop.) Well, you are very good at this. Here's one more: "You're gonna need a bigger boat." (*Jaws*—Roy Scheider to Robert Shaw, when he first sees the massive size of the killer shark.)

"You're gonna need a bigger boat." That's the memorable quote which continually rose to the surface of my mind as I studied our Gospel lesson. I kept on thinking of someone saying to the rich man, having seen the abundant harvests produced on his land, "You're gonna need a bigger barn."

Only it turns out there was no *someone else* saying this to the rich man. The rich man was saying it to himself: "I'm gonna need a bigger barn." In Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells the story of this rich man who thinks these things to himself when he realizes he has a bumper crop and, ironically, it's a dilemma for him: *What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops? I will do this: 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.'*

I think the telling point in this parable is that the rich man talks to himself, and he talks to himself about all that he thinks is his. These are my crops. My barns. My grain. My goods. Which makes me think of another memorable movie quote the younger set may recognize, consisting of one word: "Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine." (*Finding Nemo*---the annoying seagulls regarding anything that looks like food.)

Mine. Mine. The rich man in Jesus' story had everything, so it seemed. And kept everything for himself. How best to do that? Why, build a bigger barn.

The thing that prompted Jesus' telling this parable was that someone in the crowd listening to him asked Jesus to respond to a family financial squabble. See, 2,000 years ago, families fought about money, fought about property, fought about what was fair distribution of family assets. Ahh, some things never change. The person who asked Jesus to resolve this family financial conflict was essentially asking Jesus to determine what was "Mine. Mine. Mine. What stuff belongs to me?" The person attempts to make Jesus into the Suzie Orman of his day, rendering judgment on an inheritance dispute. But Jesus won't become judge or arbitrator in these issues, as he clearly states. Instead, the parable he tells of the rich fool turns the discussion on its head, and serves as his definitive response to the warped way we look at possessions.

The rich man **is** a fool. Oh, he was undoubtedly a skilled farmer and knew how to tend crops, or at least supervise those who labored on his land. But he was a fool because he considered the stuff he amassed around him as his alone, and he believed that stuff would provide security, comfort, and joy for him and for him alone. No words of thankfulness to God for the blessings of this bounty. No words about sharing this bounty with his neighbors. Just words to himself about what to do with all that was “mine, mine, mine.” So he dreams about building a bigger barn, and goes to bed that night, and dies. And you can’t take it with you. (Oh, that’s another memorable quote, from the movie of the same name: *You Can’t Take it With You*—Lionel Barrymore to Edward Arnold.)

In this brief story, Jesus speaks volumes about our obsession with having things, our human tendency to gather and hoard stuff so we feel better and worry less. And while there is every good reason for saving for a rainy day, for preparing for the future (whether it’s buying a home, paying for a college education, or making plans for retirement), sometimes we amass much more stuff than we can possibly use. I’d like to know how in the world the rich fool was going to keep his harvested crops from rotting in his big barns before he could consume them all. I know someone who has nine television sets in their house. I wonder about that, since there aren’t nine people in their household. Yet I dare not mention someone else’s possessions without being willing to look at what I have and keep for myself that I may never, ever use.

Jesus does not mince words here: *Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.* Obviously, the rich fool believed that his life did consist in the abundance of possessions. That’s what gave his life meaning. And if that’s what gives our life meaning, what will we do? We’re gonna need a bigger barn for all the stuff that is mine, mine, mine.

Jesus makes editorial comment at the story’s end. When the parable ends with the rich fool dying and his possessions going to someone else, Jesus declares to the crowd: *So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.*

Jesus says what gives our life meaning is not the vast wealth of stuff we surround ourselves with, but rather, the rich life we can have with God. Not sure exactly how to unpack that phrase “rich toward God,” but let me try this way.

I spent last Monday in a big warehouse in New Windsor, MD. I was part of a volunteer crew from Trinity who traveled to the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor. In that warehouse—and I suppose one could compare it to a big barn—we packed boxes and boxes of stuff. And none of it was to be or remain our stuff. New Windsor is a location where congregations from all over the country send stuff for use by organizations such as Lutheran World Relief and Church World Services. Congregations from states like Illinois, Michigan, and Washington, as well as Pennsylvania, send to New Windsor quilts, layette kits with diapers and receiving blankets, health kits with toothbrushes and soap, school kits with notebooks and crayons. How many folks here have donated those kinds of things through Trinity over the years? How many folks here have traveled to New Windsor to fold quilts and package up all this stuff so it may be sent to people and places in need around

the world? It is an awesome place—you should see the boxes of items coming in and going out. The quilts themselves are packaged up almost like bales of hay, rolled up in a kind of protective plastic cover. Well, I was honored that day (and frankly, rather sore the next) to participate in packing 160+ boxes, working side-by-side with people committed to caring for those who lack even the basics. The “barn” in New Windsor was full of stuff ready to be sent out, all of it contributed by people who understand they are rich toward God, and want to share their abundance with their neighbor.

Today, Rebecca Elizabeth Green received the sacrament of Holy Baptism, and she will join us in this great adventure of living richly in the kingdom of God. Now, she is barely seven months old so she’s not yet talking. But I guarantee she’ll probably say the following words in this order: *Da-da*. (Why they say *Da-da* before *Ma-ma*, I’ll never know, but that’s usually the way it is.) Next she’ll say *Ma-ma*. And then, in close proximity to each other, Rebecca will probably say *No* and then *Mine*. *Mine, mine, mine*. That is the human predicament, and a pretty clear picture of how we are simultaneously both saint and sinner—Martin Luther was so right. But her parents have brought Rebecca here to this community, to be named and claimed by God as his beloved child. For they know that in this community and in the remembrance of her baptism, Rebecca will learn life has meaning as she experiences God’s abiding presence over the years, and the abundance he offers her through his love, forgiveness, and power. Then, secure in God’s hands, Rebecca will begin to open wide her own hands in generosity toward others. And I suspect she won’t be saying, “Mine, mine, mine,” but, by the grace of God, something more like this: “Here. This is for you. Isn’t God great?” **AMEN.**