



“Building Bigger Barns”

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday & Sunday, August 3–4, 2019

All Services

The Reverend Deborah Troester
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Luke 12:13–21

One day when our daughter was about six or seven, she said, “I wish we were rich.” I think she had just been playing with a little friend who maybe had a bigger house, or more toys, or a TV in her bedroom – which we didn’t allow. I saw this as a teachable moment and answered, “but we *are* rich, honey. We have plenty to eat, clothes to wear, a nice apartment to live in...many children in the world don’t have these things, and besides, money doesn’t make you happy.” (pause) “Yes, it does,” she replied. We might smile at a child’s naiveté, but I wonder how many of us adults have really learned that money can’t buy happiness. Sure, most of us would not say we believe money can make you happy, but how many of us live as if we believe that? Our world values money above everything else. I once heard an ad that went something like this: “... there’s a how-to-manual for managing just about everything in your life, but how about a manual for what’s *really* important – your money!” Yes, money is important, but is it “what’s *really* important”?

In contrast, Jesus tells a story about a man who found out too late “what’s *really* important.” This wealthy farmer would fit well in today’s society.

He is hard-working and successful. He plans for the future. He seems to have it made. Yet there were some important things he didn’t take into account – God, for instance, and his friends and neighbors, and even his own spiritual well-being.

Talking about what’s *really* important – leaving God out of your plans is not a good idea. I presume most of you don’t do that, or you wouldn’t be here this evening/morning, but we live in a day when many consider God and religion to be totally irrelevant. And why shouldn’t they? If we who profess Christ don’t offer an alternative set of values to our culture’s materialism – if our faith doesn’t make a difference in how we live, what reason should others have for believing in God? Jesus had more to say about money than almost any other topic, so how we make it and how we spend it is not irrelevant to our faith.

Don’t get me wrong – it’s fine to use our God-given talents to produce wealth. John Wesley’s famous advice, “Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can,” is still valid. The farmer in the parable works hard and he harvests so much grain that he has to build bigger barns to store it all. But we see a man totally focused on himself and his own needs: “I have no place to store **my** crops... I will pull down **my** barns...I will build larger ones... I will store all **my** grain and **my** goods...”

There is no recognition that it was God who provided the rain and the sunshine, the strength and the energy needed to work, that all we have comes from God and we are stewards of God's bounty. As the old hymn goes, "We give Thee but Thine own, whate'er the gift may be: All that we have is Thine alone, A trust, O Lord, from Thee." This is a counter-cultural value. Our world worships money and the power that comes with it. That is why St. Paul wrote to the Colossians that greed is a form of idolatry. The more we have, the more we want, and finally our things own us, rather than us owning them.

I remember when I began to learn this lesson. We had just been married a few years and after living in a series of small apartments, we were finally moving into a small house. I remember thinking, "I wish we had just a little more space...and then it hit me. When we were newlyweds living in an efficiency apartment, I wished for a one-bedroom. When we moved into a one-bedroom apartment, I wished for two bedrooms. When we moved into a two-bedroom apartment, I wished for a house. Now that we had a house, I thought it wasn't big enough. I realized that at this rate, I would never be satisfied. So, you see where this is going! I decided then and there that I would try to be content with what I had and stop wishing for more.

I've also learned the joy that comes from giving thanks for what you have. The man in the parable who was given such tremendous blessings never once thanked God for his full barn! Apparently, he had forgotten all about God. His barn was full of grain, but his life was empty of God.

It seems he had forgotten about his neighbors as well. He could have had a big party and invited everyone in the community to celebrate his good harvest. He could have shared with the poor. He had such a big crop that there would still have been plenty left over. One of the biggest myths of our day is that there isn't enough to go around – not enough food, not enough water, not enough of life's necessities for all 7 billion of us on this planet. We have to get what we can and keep it for ourselves. That simply is not true. The world's farmers produce enough food to feed 1.5x the global population, but a lot of it is wasted, or just doesn't get to the people who need it the most. God has provided enough, but it's up to us to share. We in the church need to support local, national, and international efforts to lessen hunger in our world. We need to think of others and share what we have with them.

There is another reason for sharing what we have: because God loves us, he wants to keep us from a meaningless life of piling up more and more possessions. God knows that our greed will ultimately destroy us. We are a slave to anything we cannot freely give up. The desire for more and more stems from fear and a lack of faith in God. We fear that we will not have enough, or that someone will have more than we do, or that others will not think so highly of us unless we have a nice house or a nice car. Ages ago the prophet Isaiah asked, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" As Jesus reminds us in today's gospel reading, "...one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

Throughout our years in Africa, I have constantly been reminded of this truth when I see people who live happy and fulfilling lives without things we Americans consider necessities: indoor plumbing, electricity, a refrigerator or TV. Most of the pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia do not have these things, yet they successfully lead the church, enjoy good times with their families, and even share what they have with their neighbors who have less.

I remember how when my grandmother died my parents and I began the painful task of sorting through her belongings. She and my grandfather, who had died a few years earlier, had a beautiful home filled with many lovely things. I still treasure the Fostoria glassware that she left me and a hand-crafted wooden bowl that my grandfather made. Yet what I cherish most from my grandparents is the faith they passed on to me – the Bible stories my grandmother read me, the times they took me to Sunday School, the knowledge that they prayed for me every day of my life – this is their legacy to me, and it is worth far more than all the earthly treasures they could have left behind.

The good news is, the best things in life are free: love, joy, faith, hope. God wants us to live lives free from fear, free from greed, free from dependence on wealth or on anything else but God. Jesus came to bring us freedom – freedom from the guilt of sin, freedom to truly love others, freedom to love ourselves. Jesus invites us to his table – free of charge. We cannot out-give God. God has already given us his only Son to die for us, to bring us eternal life, to teach us how to live. These are true riches indeed. Amen.

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