

## “The Parable of the Rich Fool”

Luke 12: 13-21

I’m not sure whether to thank the author of Luke for this story or to have a stern conversation with him for including it. He gives the preacher an uneasy task, the task of talking about money, the need for it, and the supposed security of it. This is one of those stories that makes us squirm in our seats a bit. It hits a little too close to home for us. Because it makes us start thinking about, wondering about what sets us apart from the rich fool.

After all like him, we fully admit that we want security in life. So we try to save up our money. We make plans for retirement. We try to follow our financial advisor’s advice by being smart and planning for our future. That seems to be the mature and responsible thing to do, right?

So why is it that when we read this story, we find ourselves asking, “What exactly makes this guy a fool?” He seems to be doing everything right, at least according to our understanding of the need to plan for the future. What exactly makes this guy a fool?

Okay first things first, in this text, we need to understand that Jesus is not saying money is bad. I think Jesus would agree that money is a necessary thing in

life. I think Jesus would even go one step farther and say that for us to do God's work here on earth, we need money. It would be foolish or even hypocritical to act otherwise. There are projects and missions to support. There are clothing banks, food pantries, Habitat homes, storm clean up, and homeless shelters to name just a few. All of these projects happen because of money. All of the organizations that provide such services which care for the well-being of God's people need money. Mission and Ministry takes money. Money is a part of life. So please hear me say that this text is not about the evils of money. Jesus was clear in his teachings about the need for money and how to use it wisely for the building up of God's Kingdom here on Earth.

What Jesus is cautioning people about in this text is greed or as it is referred to in Greek "the yearning to have more". Jesus knew that we all have this insatiable feeling of never having enough, always wanting more and more. Jesus knew that we have this tendency to look around at other people and what other people have or have not, and want more than them. Jesus knew that our world is designed to always have us seeking more and more, never having enough. The parable wants to break us out of that cycle by asking us "When is enough enough?"

Let me explain. This story once again is only told in the Gospel of Luke. It comes right after Jesus has cautioned his disciples against hypocrisy and his

conversation with the Pharisees about them neglecting to practice what they preach.

So interestingly enough, right in the middle of this conversation, this conversation about hypocrisy, this conversation about practicing what we preach, someone interrupts Jesus by asking him to arbitrate a family argument over an inheritance. We can almost imagine Jesus doing the face palm. Oh, you know what I'm talking about...that moment when you just finished explaining something and a person asks a question seeking the very information that you just finished giving...All you can do in that moment is do a face palm...and shake your head.

This is that moment for Jesus. He handles this interruption not by ignoring this guy but by telling this parable.

A couple of other things to notice in this text....First we need to realize that this man is not portrayed as wicked or evil. We are not told that he takes advantage of his workers, pays them low wages, runs sweat shops or overlooks hazardous working conditions. This man is simply a farmer who has experienced a bountiful harvest.

For Jesus and for us, the teaching moment comes in the fact that this guy thinks he has gained all this wealth all on his own. And that certainly is not the case. As I said, this guy is a farmer and if we asked any farmers, we would

discover that farming is not a solo job! It takes lots of people to help bring in the harvest. It takes the creative touch of God to make things grow. It takes the connection of many different things and people to produce such a gift of plenty. So regardless of what he thinks, this man did not receive this gift because of his own hard work. Others helped. Others worked right there beside him. Others were a part of the process.

The other thing to notice about this text is that this man talks to no one other than himself. He speaks only to himself. He congratulates only himself. He plans only for himself. Everything he does is only for himself. It is so bad that he starts having a separate conversation with himself within the first conversation with himself. This is not the normal talking to ourselves...you know like when you lose your keys and you say, "I wonder where I left them" or you say to yourself, "What do I have to do today? Everyone does that. This is not the "talking to yourself" like this man is doing in this text.

This man only talks to himself because he is disconnected from his community. By his own choice, this man has broken ties with everyone and in doing so, he misses out on the experiences of life that connect us more fully with one another and with our God. You know, experiences that come from sharing our gifts, sharing our time, even sharing ourselves with others. Experiences like the joy

of coming together and supporting one another. Experiences like the joy of experiencing all of life, the good, the bad, the ugly and the breath-takingly beautiful, the joy of experiencing all of life with others.

This parable stands as a word of caution for us as disciples to rethink what we would call a good life. Even in Luke's time, people of faith thought and equated a blessed life with the good life. If you had lots of stuff, then you must be doing okay. You must be really a good person. Just like back then, the train of thought was that things brought you satisfaction. Things brought you joy. Things brought you wholeness.

In this parable, Luke is reminding his church and us that real life does not consist of an abundance of possessions. Life consists of being in relationship with God. Life consists of being in relationship with our brothers and sisters. Luke is challenging the often held ideal of what we think exactly makes the good life.

With this text that hits too close to home, with this text that makes us uncomfortable, Luke is challenging us to change our definition of the good life. He wants us to remember that the good life is not full of possessions. Rather, it is a life full of God, a life secure in God's promises. The good life is about trusting that God will always with us. The good life is about experiencing all of life with others.

Instead of yearning for more and more possessions, we as people of faith are called to yearn for a life that is grounded in relationships, relationships with others, relationship with our God. We are called to yearn for a life that awakens us to the beauty and wonder that fills God's creation. Luke wants us to see beyond ourselves and experience the Kingdom of God through our relationships with all of God's children.

In our text, what we discover as the thing that sets us apart from the Rich Fool is not the need for security or the planning for our future. What sets us apart from the Rich Fool is that it is all about his needs. It is all about his wants. It is all about saving for himself. "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." It is only about me, myself and I.

For this man, there is no community. There is no God. There are no relationships. Even worse, there is no experience of the Kingdom of God on earth for this man. There is no joy. There is no love. There is no grace. And for Luke, that is not a good life. For Luke, that is an empty life. For Luke, that is unfulfilled life.

Recently, there has been a meme floating around the Facebook world about J.K Rowling, the author who wrote the enormously popular Harry Potter Series.

This meme says that she is the first billionaire to ever be kicked off the Forbes “Billionaire List” because of her charitable giving. She is quoted to have said, “I think you have a moral responsibility, when you’ve been given far more than you need, to do wise things with it and give intelligently.” Great story and even better sermon illustration especially when we are talking about the Parable of the Rich Fool.

But as always whenever there is an article or quote on Facebook, the prudent thing to do is to look it up to see if it is true. So much to my surprise, the story of J.K Rowling is true. In 2012, she did indeed fall of the coveted list of billionaires because she gave away 16% of her fortune to charity and well, because of the British high tax rate.

But what really caught my attention about this story is that she wasn’t the first. There have been several people who have dropped off this list of billionaires, all because they have given away most of their money to charity.

I found myself asking “Why didn’t that make the headlines?” Why aren’t we celebrating these people’s generosity? Why aren’t we celebrating the fact that they realized there was more to life than money and possessions and decided to share the abundance with others?

I don't know the reasons why this is. Maybe because that wouldn't sell headlines. Maybe because if that was what we really valued as a society, our consumeristic world would fall apart. Or maybe it is simply because it is easier to yearn for more and more things than to be in relationship with others.

But one thing I do know is that I wish that was the list, the list that contained the billionaires, the list that contained the ordinary people, the list that contains all people who really understand what it means to be in relationship with other, in relationship with our God, was the list that actually caught the headlines. Not the list of people who have billions and billions of dollars but rather the list that contains the names of all the people who realize that it is not about me. Who realize that is about us, as a community, working together, living together, serving together so that all of God's children can and will experience the good life of grace and love here on Earth. That's the list I want to see capturing the headlines and inspiring us to all become the people of connection that God calls us to be.

There is a joke in the preaching world that a great sermon has three points and a poem. I'm not sure that I made three points but I definitely want to leave you with a poem. It is written by Shel Silverstein, a phenomenal children's writer, whose poetry captures the big picture and breaks it down into beautiful words of wisdom for all ages. So I leave you with these words:

# Lester

Lester was given a magic wish  
By the goblin who lives in the banyan tree,  
And with his wish he wished for two more wishes—  
So now instead of just one wish, he cleverly had three.  
And with each one of these  
He simply wished for three more wishes,  
Which gave him three old wishes, plus nine new.  
And with each of these twelve  
He slyly wished for three more wishes.  
Which added up to forty-six—or is it fifty-two?  
Well anyway, he used each wish  
To wish for wishes 'til he had  
Five billion, seven million, eighteen thousand thirty-four.  
And then he spread them on the ground  
And skipped and sang, and then sat down  
And wished for more.  
And more... And more... They multiplied  
While other people smiled and cried  
And loved and reached and touched and felt.  
Lester sat amid his wealth  
Stacked mountain-high like stacks of gold.  
Sat and counted—and grew old.  
And then one Thursday night they found him  
Dead—with his wishes piled around him.  
And they counted the lot and found that not  
A single one was missing.  
All shiny and new—here, take a few  
And think of Lester as you do.  
In a world of apples and kisses and shoes  
He wasted his wishes on wishing.

-Shel Silverstein

In a world of apples and kisses and shoes, may we not waste our wishes on wishing but rather experiencing the Kingdom of God in our midst. Amen.