

***GOSPEL READING Luke 12:13-21** New International Version (NIV)

The Parable of the Rich Fool

¹³ *Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”*

¹⁴ *Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”* ¹⁵ *Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”*

¹⁶ *And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’*

¹⁸ *“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹ And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’*

²⁰ *“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’*

²¹ *“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”*

Who remembers George Carlin and his classic 1986 routine about *Stuff*? That’s what this parable makes me think of... I can hear him now...

“...all you need in life, is a little place for your stuff, ya know? I can see it on your table, everybody's got a little place for their stuff. This is my stuff, that's your stuff, that'll be his stuff over there. That's all you need in life, a little place for your stuff. That's all your house is: a place to keep your stuff. If you didn't have so much stuff, you wouldn't need a house. You could just walk around all the time.

A house is just a pile of stuff with a cover on it. You can see that when you're taking off in an airplane. You look down, you see everybody's got a little pile of stuff. All the little piles of stuff. And when you leave your house, you gotta lock it up. Wouldn't want somebody to come by and take some of your stuff. They always take the good stuff. They never bother with that [junk] you're saving. All they want is the shiny stuff. That's what your house is, a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get...more stuff! Sometimes you gotta move, gotta get a bigger house. Why? No room for your stuff anymore.... ”

I considered playing the entire routine for you, it’s so much better in the master’s own voice, but it has some cursing in it, and it’s over 5 minutes long – valuable preaching time....

So here’s Jesus addressing yet another crowd and some heckler stands up and – kinda like Martha a couple of weeks ago – tries to tell Jesus to do something that would benefit himself. “Teacher! Tell my brother to divide the inheritance.” And how does Jesus respond? He doesn’t, really.... He responds the same way to this guy’s demand as he did to Martha’s. He flips the conversation around and uses it to kickstart a teaching moment – complete with slightly scary parable.

Let me remind you when we think about Jesus’ response to the man’s request how important inheritance was back then, and how much attention is given to matters of inheritance in the Hebrew Bible. Inheritance was a fundamental part of ensuring the future of one’s entire family and livelihood.

Numbers 27:8-11 NIV -- "... 'If a man dies and leaves no son, turn his inheritance over to his daughter. 9 If he has no daughter, give his inheritance to his brothers. 10 If he has no brothers, give his inheritance to his father's brothers. 11 If his father had no brothers, give his inheritance to the nearest relative in his clan, that he may possess it. This is to be a legal requirement for the Israelites, as the LORD commanded Moses.' "

Pretty serious... Here’s another one **Deuteronomy 21:15-17** that gives us a good example. Primogeniture, or succession by the eldest son, clearly seems to have been the preferred rule...

¹⁵ If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love, ¹⁶ when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love. ¹⁷ He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him.

AND... as a side note; if a daughter DID inherit she would either have to marry her father’s brother’s son, OR one of the father’s household slaves...which is also an enlightening look at “Biblical marriage” and what that actually entailed.

The right of the firstborn was the rule of law all the way back to Moses – Maybe that’s why the brother won’t divide the inheritance – because he doesn’t have to!

Maybe that’s why Jesus pretty much shuts the guy down, saying, “Who made me the divider & arbiter of your stuff?”

Jesus – brilliant teacher and public speaker – then uses the moment as the perfect, smooth segue into a sort of scary parable about the Rich Fool.

Merriam Webster online defines a parable as, “a short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle”

A certain rich man had gathered a lot of stuff, in this case, an abundant harvest. He thought to himself -- the man talks to himself through the whole story – but he wonders what to do with his stuff. And he says to himself, “Self – tear down those barns and build bigger ones; I’ll put my stuff in there.”

Then – I don’t know if you noticed – but the man talks to himself – again – but he’s telling himself what he’s going to say to himself when he talks to himself later! He says to himself, “You’ve got stuff enough to last for years – sit back and enjoy life! Eat, drink, and be merry!”

Then God interrupts his little reverie: “Fool! You didn’t know it – nobody does – but your time is up tonight. What’re you gonna do with all your stuff now? Surprise!”

And Jesus’ simply says in explanation... “This is how it will be with whoever stores things up for themselves but is not rich toward God.” --Rich toward God.

The man is thinking only of himself – only talking to himself the whole time – I have lot of stuff. I need more space. I need a bigger barn. I, I, I....

He is not ‘rich toward God.’ It’s not that storing things up for the future or being rich is a bad thing...that’s not what this parable is about. It’s what you do with it that matters. Next week we’ll talk about Luke 12:32 -- about laying up our treasures in Heaven and not here on earth where they get moth-eaten and rot.

What about our retirement plans? What about my pension and my 401k that I keep putting money into? Is that self-centered hoarding? Are we ignoring God’s promise of provision? Should we be giving all that to God – to the poor?

Maybe this parable begs the question, “How much is enough? When do we say ‘when?’” What’s the difference between ‘need’ and ‘want?’

As you know I recently moved...I still am! I am so grateful that I haven’t collected so much stuff that I need 75 boxes and a giant truck to haul it all up here. I’ve been visiting consignment shops and thrift stores, and I see all this cool stuff – more stuff, right – really cool stuff that I think I need. Of course I certainly don’t need it and thank goodness there’s a voice in the back of my head somewhere that quietly says, “clutter.” That comes from moving a lot.

The church in AZ where I just served my internship last year had the good fortune to host the Asante Children’s Choir from Rwanda and Burundi. My friend Jenn was lucky enough to be a host family for a couple of the children and a chaperone. They stayed for a couple of nights and got to know each other fairly well, and the children and the chaperone kept looking around my friend’s modest two bedroom home, ‘ooh-ing and ahh-ing’ and talking excitedly to each other in Swahili. They kept this up for both days as they discovered different little aspects about the house – tv’s, garage, bathrooms. Finally Jenn asked the chaperone what is was that had the boys so excited – what were they taking about?

“They want to know how I became friends with such a rich person as you,” the chaperone said.

“Just explain to them I’m really not that well off at all,” Jenn replied.

“I couldn’t do that – if you came to visit where they live you would see that there is no way I could tell them that you are not quite wealthy.”

I had seen places just like where these kids lived. I had seen the corrugated tin shacks and lean-to’s and dirt floors of the homes that we’d visited in Costa Rica.

Maybe the barn I have is big enough – but I need that cool jeep that’s for sale over on the other side of the park! Well, I guess I don’t really need it – but I will need if I want to take that road over Schofield pass, wont I? Yeah...so I kinda do need it... Is enough ever enough?

Here’s a great example of when enough is enough. Think about this today while we partake of the communion feast. We use a method of communion called ‘intinction’ or as we rather irreverently called it in seminary, “rip & dip.” We tear a small piece of bread and dip it in the juice and eat it. Other churches use little cubes of white bread and tiny cups of juice, or thin wafers and a shared cup -- “Feast” indeed! – these tiny bits of bread dipped in juice hardly even qualify as a snack, but we still talk about like a feast or even a banquet! It really isn’t very much, is it?

BUT... it is enough. It’s enough to do what it’s supposed to do – It’s enough to do what we need it to do and want it to do...

It’s just a taste, and that’s enough to remind us of God’s enormous love for us and our place at the table with all of God’s children – Children, by the way, who are all inheriting the kingdom right along with God’s own firstborn.

Amen.