

10th Sunday after Pentecost
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sunday, July 25, 2010

GOSPEL: Luke 12:13-21

13Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” 14But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” 15And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” 16Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ 18Then he said, ‘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. 19And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ 20But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

¹³ Εἶπεν δὲ τις ἐκ τοῦ ὄχλου αὐτῷ· διδάσκαλε, εἰπέ τῷ ἀδελφῷ μου μερίσασθαι μετ’ ἐμοῦ τὴν κληρονομίαν. ¹⁴ ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ἄνθρωπε, τις με κατέστησεν κριτὴν ἢ μεριστὴν ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς; ¹⁵ εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτοὺς· ὁρᾶτε καὶ φυλάσσεσθε ἀπὸ πάσης πλεονεξίας, ὅτι οὐκ ἐν τῷ περισσεύειν τινὶ ἡ ζωὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ. ¹⁶ Εἶπεν δὲ παραβολὴν πρὸς αὐτοὺς λέγων· ἀνθρώπου τινὸς πλουσίου εὐφόρησεν ἡ χώρα. ¹⁷ καὶ διελογίζετο ἐν ἑαυτῷ λέγων· τί ποιήσω, ὅτι οὐκ ἔχω ποῦ συνάξω τοὺς καρπούς μου; ¹⁸ καὶ εἶπεν· τοῦτο ποιήσω, καθελῶ μου τὰς ἀποθήκας καὶ μείζονας οἰκοδομήσω καὶ συνάξω ἐκεῖ πάντα τὸν σῖτον καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ μου ¹⁹ καὶ ἐρῶ τῇ ψυχῇ μου, ψυχὴ, ἔχεις πολλὰ ἀγαθὰ [κείμενα εἰς ἔτη πολλά· ἀναπαύου, φάγε, πίε,] εὐφραίνου. ²⁰ εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς· ἄφρων, ταύτη τῇ νυκτὶ τὴν ψυχὴν σου αἰτοῦσιν ἀπὸ σοῦ· ἃ δὲ ἠτοίμασας τίνι ἔσται; ²¹ [οὕτως ὁ θησαυρίζων ἑαυτῷ καὶ μὴ εἰς θεὸν πλουτῶν.]

Barns and Ignoble

+ *In nomine Domini. Amen.*

I cannot recall the first time I heard the “Parable of the Rich Fool”, but I know I was pretty young and that I was sitting in the congregation next to my Father and that it was the middle of a typical Southeast Pennsylvania Summer: hot, high humidity, every father in the un-air-conditioned church wearing a suit and tie, every boy in the congregation looking like a miniature version of his father, every mother and daughter dressed to the nines as well, and every other grandmother fanning herself and if one was very lucky her grandchildren with those hand-fans decorated on one side with a very worn picture of the Last Supper and on the other side the name and phone number of the local funeral parlor which gave them out as advertising to the local churches.

It was summer, it was hot, and the pastor was doing his best to keep the sermon short but intense ... talking about tearing down barns and building new barns and the Rich Fool who had everything and more and then died ...

I remember looking around the congregation as he said these things ... in front of me was Mr. B¹ who had more barns than any other farmer in the congregation, and right on cue his head was

¹ I’m using *initials* only, just to be safe.

snapped back in his Sunday Morning Pastor is Preaching the Sermon Sound Asleep Position and was audibly snoring ... across the aisle and about three pews up was Mr. G whose barn had just burned down ... and over behind me and to the left when I turned my head a bit – which you weren't supposed to do in church ... that is, look around at other people, but when I did I saw Mr. J who had a farm without barns and I wasn't sure how that was possible ... and I remember thinking about our barn, the barn I loved, filled with hay, grain, a few cows, old equipment, a great place for exploring and I began to look worried ... tear it down? And then my Father, noticing my anxiety, whispered to me “Don't worry, we'll never be in the position of having too much to put in one barn.” ... and smiled, and then put his arm behind me alongside the top of the pew and as he always did, tapped me on the shoulder.

[The barn, by the way, was indeed torn down later ... but I have in my possession a piece of it ... about 5 feet of a hand-hewn beam showing the *post and beam* construction which sometime I might just bring to church to show you ...]

+++

As much, however, as the story is about barns and a foolish man, it's beginning lies in a question, rather a demand of Jesus (so says Luke the Gospel Story Teller). Someone comes up to Jesus and demands that he instruct his brother to divide the family inheritance with him. And so, as is the typical Jesus method, he refuses to do it and instead does what he usually does, tells a story.²

And the story is about possessions and abundance and greed or as the 4th/5th Century North African Saint Augustine preached in a sermon about this parable, “Greed wants to divide, just as love desires to gather.”³

It leads to being possessed by possessions, Jesus is hinting in his parable, you end up being rich, but not rich toward God, and that means a dying of the self.

The word *greed* is found in Old English ... *graedig* it means “voracious” also “covetous” ... it's also found in Old Norse meaning “hunger” ... in Sanskrit it means “wanting more than you need” ... in old Greek the word was *philargyros* “money-loving” ... in German *habsuchtig* ... from *haben* “to have” and *sucht* “sickness, or disease) ... That is, greed is a universal concept seeking to describe the universal problem “a sickness to have something.”

It's the hunger or ache for *more* ...

I have a perfectly good Waterman Phileas™ fountain pen, in fact it is the *only* pen I use ... and from time to time I hear a thought banging against the inside of my brain from side to side, it says “Ben. If one Waterman pen makes you happy, think of how happy you would be if you had two?” And every time I succumb to that thought, and buy another Waterman pen ... I find that I lose that other pen or I drop it or the ink dries up inside it or it leaks into my pocket. I begin to loath it ...

Greed is the hunger for more.

The Rich Fool – though rich is a fool because when he has a windfall, he doesn't run into the village celebrating and telling everyone about his plan to share his good fortune with the community ... he turns inward and remains inside himself. Eleven times he uses the first person (I, my) and never once “our” “their”. And he dies.

² Have you noticed throughout the Gospel Stories, that Jesus always refuses the demands of people, unless it is for healing, and compassion, and love? He still does, by the way, even though some of his most professed followers demand that he agree with their bigotry, hate, prejudice and ongoing nastiness ... sorry, Jesus will always refuse to go there, even if it means one might have to change ones mind, or life

³ Sermon 265

Those great theologians of the last Century, Paul McCartney and John Lennon (two of the Beatles) put it this way:

*Say you don't need no diamond rings
And I'll be satisfied
Tell me that you want the kind of things
That money just can't buy
I don't care too much for money
Money can't buy me love*

There will be a slideshow in the _____ which you can visit after the Service, complete with images of the Parable of the Rich Fool, and for your singing pleasure this week the words to *Can't Buy Me Love* are on the back page of this bulletin.

We are so used to looking at the price tag on things ... “Where did you get that?” “How much did you pay for it?” ... that we miss the priceless worth of our own lives, how precious we are in the sight of God, every single one of us. That, says Jesus, is the mistake of the rich fool. He could have known joy in the short time he had left, if he had spread out the abundance of his goods among the community.

Again, Saint Augustine: “He was planning to fill his soul with excessive and unnecessary feasting and was proudly disregarding all those empty bellies of the poor. He did not realize that the bellies of the poor were much safer storerooms than his barns.”⁴

I had a professor in Seminary who reminded us that following Jesus teaches us that our center is not inside ourselves, but outside ... in the lives of those around us, in the anguish of those in pain and suffering, in the sorrow of those who are grieving, in the empty refrigerators of the hungry, in the hospital rooms, the lonely corridors of the prisons, the winsome wanderings of those with mental illness, the questions of humanity, the wars that need to be ended, the oceans that need to be cleaned up, the governments that need to learn compassion, the corporations that need to learn sharing, the vacant dwelling places that need to be filled with the homeless, the cries of babies who need to be held ... there and in so much more is where ones center is, if one is a follower of Jesus.

It is not about how much we have and can hold, but how much we can give and love. That *is* the Gospel.

Let us pray. Holy One, who satisfies our souls with good things, Empower us to set our minds on you, not on things only of the earth. Fill any emptiness and fear with your grace. Give us the courage to set aside that which perishes, and to live in freedom -speaking truth, offering bread, shelter and comfort to others, trusting in you, our Freedom, our Truth, our Bread. In the name of Jesus, giver all good gifts, **Amen.**

*Deo Gratias (+)
The Rev. Benjamin Larzelere III
Pastor, Christ Lutheran Church
Santa Fe, NM*

⁴ Sermon 36