



northminster presbyterian church

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05-Aug-2007

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 3:1-11 Luke 12:13-21

SERMON: We're Gonna Need A Bigger Barn (Rev. Brent Anderson)

INTRODUCTION

This is one of those passages where Jesus holds up a mirror to my life that I really don't want to face. Jesus shows us something about ourselves and our instincts in this passage; really our way of life that we would just prefer to keep under the radar. And we are tempted to say, "Jesus, don't mess with the status quo. Don't mess with our stuff!"

THE PASSAGE

Prior to our passage, Jesus has been teaching the disciples and the crowds about hypocrisy and fear. And in the crowd is a man who is upset about not getting his fair share of the family inheritance. His father probably died recently and apparently his brother was refusing to follow the Law of Moses which dictated how the estate should be divided. And so this man interrupts Jesus. He turns to Jesus, expecting some sympathy and support. He says, "*Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.*"

Normally, Jesus doesn't mind being interrupted. He'll stop and pick up little children or heal someone's daughter. But here, Jesus seems to be a little annoyed. Our translation of the text has Jesus saying, "*Friend, who made me judge or arbitrator over you all.*" (The "you" is plural there, so we can imagine that this disgruntled man is probably standing opposite his brother). But in the original language, Jesus uses the word anthropos, which is normally translated as "Man". "Man, who set me to be judge or divider over y'all?" Not exactly a sympathetic response. He probably expected Jesus to help plead his case, but instead, Jesus appears a little annoyed and rightly so.

Think about it. This man has just lost his father and all he can think about is the inheritance? And instead of coming together in grief, coming together to celebrate the life of their father, these two brothers are fighting over the father's stuff? So Jesus gives them a warning.

THE WARNING

Jesus says, "*Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.*" This was not exactly what either of the men probably wanted to hear, *but this is what they needed to hear.* And how often it is that we need to hear those words; "*Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.*"

IN THE GRIP

It's amazing how greed can creep into our lives. In the book, Way to Live, Mark Yaconelli describes the grip that possessions can have on us. He says, "None of us decide to make 'stuff' the center of our lives. Instead, bit by bit stuff begins to take up our lives... We get a new television; we want a new DVR; we need a new computer; we decide to get a new car. Soon most of our waking time is spent thinking about, maintaining, and interacting with 'Stuff'. Jesus said "*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Matt 6:21). In other words, those "things" you think about, worry about, spend time with, and long for will become the focus of your life." (Way to Live pg. 63; adapted)

Think of all the marriages that have been ruined and the families that have been devastated because we're working too many hours, buying too much and getting too deep in debt. We piled on stress and debt. And while we might have a lot of good "stuff" to show for it, our lives aren't any richer. We think more things will help us live a richer, fuller life. But it's not always the case.

THE PARABLE – WE'RE GONNA NEED A BIGGER BARN!

And that's the point that Jesus is trying to get across to these two brothers. So he tells them a parable about a wealthy farmer who has an extraordinary year. His land produces crops that are so big that he doesn't have room in his barns to hold all of them. Immediately he thinks, "We're gonna need a bigger barn!" He needs to build new and bigger barns to hold all of his stuff.

In our society, in our eyes, this man is the epitome of success. He's just been named "Farmer of the Year" and now, because of all of the "stuff" he has gathered, he feels confident that he is ready to announce his retirement. His plan: relax, eat, drink and be merry. He's the poster-child of success. Yet, to God, he's a fool. God says to him, "*You fool! This very night your life (actually, "soul" in the original Greek) is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?*"

And we begin to hear the faint echo of Luke 9:25 where Jesus says, "*What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses or forfeits his soul?*" *He who dies with the most toys doesn't win.*

What's the problem here? Why is he a fool? Notice how this man responded to his good fortune. Listen again to what he said: "*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.*"

Do you hear how self-centered that speech is? He's talking to himself and all he can say is "My, My, My, My, My!" "My crops, my barns, my grain, my goods." Those words must be ringing in the brother's ears.

As Christians we believe all that we have is a gift from God who wants us to take care of it, enjoy it and use it to spread God's love, God's joy, and God's peace. The earth and all that is created comes from God and ultimately returns to God. We're to use the portion we've been given with care and wisdom. Like the Good Samaritan; we're to help our neighbors and to alleviate the suffering of others.

But did this farmer think about his neighbors? *No.* Did he thank God for the bountiful harvest? *No.* Instead, he acted like the ancient Israelites who wandered in the desert. When God provided them with manna, some of them tried to store it up and hoard it rather than trusting that God would continue to provide for them. And so the manna went bad.

The message of this parable isn't that it's bad to be rich or that all stuff is bad. The message is that it's important to be aware of how we relate to our stuff. *There is more to life than stuff.*

The point here is that stuff changes us. It affects how we think, how we act, how we live. It can overpower us. Stuff can consume us. If we're fixated on accumulating wealth—if our primary concern is getting bigger houses, better cars, and nicer clothes—then we need to hear Jesus' warning. He took one look at the rich man and said: "*So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.*"

Bill and Melinda Gates have heard that warning and they are using their money to fund medical research to eradicate malaria and other Third World diseases. *God bless them!*

Andrew Carnegie heard that message and used his wealth to start the public library movement in this country. *God bless him!*

Alfred Nobel heard that message and used his money to endow the Nobel Prizes — to encourage excellence and to promote peace. *God bless him!*

CONCLUDING STORY – 40 DAYS TO FREEDOM

In the book, *Way to Live*, there is the story of a youth pastor who gave his youth group a radical assignment. Over the forty days of Lent, they were asked to give away 40 possessions, one item a day for 40 days.

There were two rules: First, they were not allowed to give away junk; the items had to be valuable to someone. Second, no item given away could be replaced within the coming year. The purpose of the assignment was to give the youth group members the opportunity to see what it would be like to have less stuff, to live with fewer possessions, to live a simpler life.

Alexx, one of the members of the youth group, accepted the challenge. He was intrigued by what the youth pastor shared with the group about Jesus and the early Christians who lived with very few possessions. For Alexx, the challenge was harder than he thought. Not because there were things he couldn't live without. Making the list of forty items was easy. The hard part was convincing people to take the stuff. Because it had value, people couldn't believe he was giving it away for free; that he didn't expect something in return. *They thought he was crazy.*

But day after day, he brought items to school and to different community organizations and offered them to the person or people he thought would appreciate them or could use them the most.

And at the end of the forty day challenge, Alexx noticed a significant change in his life. Over those 40 days, he had loosened the grip that "stuff" had had on his life. His life no longer revolved around getting and spending money. He was no longer focused on getting the newest gadget, the newest game, the newest clothes, or the newest phone. He felt a freedom he had never had before. Instead of being focused only on himself, now he was able to focus on the people around him and what he could give. *And having less stuff meant fewer things to distract him in his relationship with God.*

Now I'm not suggesting that we all do this today... although it wouldn't be a bad exercise for a lot of us, including myself. I am suggesting that we take stock of what is important in our lives; that we re-align our priorities; *that we be on our guard against all kinds of greed.*

Jesus tells a parable to two brothers who are quarreling over their father's inheritance. Imagine for a moment, that as Jesus is telling this parable, that the two brothers suddenly realize that the story being told, is the story of their father's life; the story of a powerful and wealthy man who had worked hard to provide well for his family; a man who had hoped to leave a strong legacy for his children, but who instead left a climate of greed and selfishness. The gospel says nothing else about these two brothers, but we can be sure, that they got the point that day.

Perhaps today is a day to take inventory. Are we "better off" today? Or do we still have some work to do; some adjustments to make to find true prosperity? May God bless each and every one of us as we seek to have life to the full; *to be rich toward God. Amen*

Colossians 3:1-11

1So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, 3for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. 5Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). 6On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. 7These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. 8But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. 9Do not lie to one

another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. ¹¹In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

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."

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