A Sermon for DaySpring

By. Tiffani Harris

“*The Rich Fool and Abundant Living*”

Luke 12:13-21

August 4, 2019

Thanks to our children for sharing about their camp.

Let us pray together, Almighty God with heavy hearts we ask again for an end to violence. We grieve and we are numb to violence and wrath. We live with despair and anger all around us. Deliver us O Lord. Holy Spirit come and restore lives and bring hope to the hopeless. We pray for the cities of El Paso and Dayton, for those affected by violence and for those prone to violence – may your peaceful kingdom come. It seems like trauma begets trauma and anger begets wrath. We live in a culture desensitized to violence and trauma and yet its corrosiveness continues to deform and harm. Help the church to be a place of trauma healing for you are the great Healer and Counselor. Enable us to be your witnesses to a people, a nation and a world struggling to live in peace and harmony. And now guide us O God, by your Word and Holy Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom and, in your will, discover peace; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**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 clapped his hands and danced around
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.

Some of you may be familiar with this poem: “Lester” by Shel Silverstein. In today’s parable, the rich fool, as he is called, seems a lot like Silverstein’s Lester. The rich man in the parable has missed the mark in living the Christ-like abundant life. He may be a lot like Lester who seems preoccupied, isolated and insulated to the joy and pain around him. By all measures of our society’s standards, however, the rich fool has succeeded. His land produced abundantly in a bumper crop year, and he has saved for the future so that he can live merrily. **Without thought to anyone else, this man has planned out how his days are going to go and what he will do with his riches**.

To some, it was shocking that Christ calls this rich man a fool. After all, he produced, planned and saved – isn’t he shrewd? Nonetheless, he is a fool because he has chosen the values of the world over the values of the kingdom of God. A fool is one who acts unwisely or imprudently *– a fool is without virtue.*

He seems to have an “I” problem. In this soliloquy in Luke, we have a first-hand view into his thought process . . . as he asks himself: “What shall **I** do? **I** will tear down **my** barns and make bigger barns, **I** will store all **my** grain and **my** goods and **I** will be merry.” The passage does not indicate that he was dishonest or cheated others but that he had good fortune and the land produced . . . yet he still gets it wrong. It is not that saving is bad *or that money is bad*. The issue **here** is that this man thinks of no one else.

Did he harvest the food all by himself?

Did he plant all the seeds and tend the crops singlehandedly?

He does not think of the vulnerable around him **nor does he think of the One who provides all to all**. He does not acknowledge his Creator. Money isn’t the problem . . . it is looking to money for fulfillment that is one of this man’s problems. **He has no need for God.**

**Living with a mindset of scarcity is a breeding ground for hoarding and greed and even violence.** When we think there is not enough, it is hard to trust **and** it is hard to be generous. Research has shown that those who live with an **abundance mentality** are more generous, more gracious when others succeed, **and less anxious or fearful that they will be left out**. They make decisions out of a belief that there is enough to go around. (Covey) It takes courage to trust that there will be enough. This can be especially difficult work to trust when financial pressures loom each month. **Let’s be clear, this parable is about priorities and tells a story of someone who has no thought of God or others.**

**This passage is situated in a section of Luke where Christ is teaching about being prepared for the judgment of God.** Jesus warns about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. And he urges public confession of faith in Christ as the Son of God. Seemingly out of the blue, a man interrupts Jesus wanting him to settle a brotherly dispute about an inheritance. The irony is clear -- **our words and actions must reflect God’s kingdom.** Refusing to enter into a family dispute, Christ replies: **“Beware, be on your guard against every form of greed”** and proceeds to share this parable which would have been immediately understood by the hearers.

**Christ knows the insidious nature of greed. Greed distracts and it clouds our vision resulting in confusion about what it means to live a meaningful life.** Greed means acquiring without reference or concern to one’s own specific needs or to the situation of others (Nolland, p. 688). Greed is not limited to money, however. We can be distracted by greed with things, with people, with experiences, and with comforts. This rich man had missed the meaningful and abundant life because of his preoccupation with preparing for **his** future. He now has to answer to God for neglecting his responsibilities to God and neighbor.

Christ’s words about greed prod us to consider our own possessions and accumulations**. With the constant media barrage of mindless materialism, we need to hear from each other, as fellow pilgrims on the road.** We need to remind each other that our lives do not consist of what we have, what we don’t have, or what we want. Talking about money and possessions, wealth and poverty is difficult and so we often avoid the topic altogether. Neglecting to talk about the many ethical decisions we must face when it comes to money leaves the voices of our materialistic culture ringing loud and clear without challenge.

**Can the church BE a place where we talk about our possessions and ethical decisions that are associated with money and privilege?** Certainly, we can only do this when we approach each other in humility, and when we seek what is best for our brother and sister first. It might mean that in our small groups, in a class, or among friends, we give each other permission to challenge and hold each other accountable in abstaining from mindless materialism. I heard recently how one small group committed to not buy anything new for at least 6 months to help break the hold that materialism had on them.

You and I **mostly** know that our possessions do not equate with long term **happiness, yet we are tempted by the constant stream of items designed to make ourselves and our lives better and happier.** We need each other to speak truth to combat the messages we constantly receive. These messages tell us: that if only we had or did this, we would be better, happier, more secure and healthier. The advertising industry seeks to make us feel unsatisfied which makes us want more. And they do this in subtle and in blatant ways that are continually before us popping up on our screens, in banners, fb ads, there seems to be no escape - -it is an endless barrage of messages. **We must share with each other a different message** – the message of the Gospel that we are enough, most of us have enough and that we are called to live with generosity in God’s kingdom. There are many ways in which we might begin to hold each other accountable to living generously towards others and rich towards God**. Most often, it will require meekness and a teachable and generous spirit. May God enable us to be this vulnerable with each other.**

The rich fool forgot that all that he had, came from the Lord. Forgetting that the wealth and provision was **not his** to begin with, **he neglected to ask how God wanted those resources to be used.** He was not “rich towards God.” He had not yet learned what the teacher in Ecclesiastes learned. The teacher had it all – abundance, possessions, wealth, experiences, eating, drinking, and “being merry,” and yet, came to realize that all the accumulation, pleasure, and toil is vanity in light of God’s goodness, purposes, and provision.

While it is alluring to live our lives only for ourselves in worldly abundance, the reality is -- **that type of life is often empty and leads us away from a life lived in communion with God and God’s church**. NT Wrighttalks about this deception in an interview noting that abundance for many people means “lots of stuff . . . [but] that isn’t abundance.” The kind of abundance that Christ brings is an abundance of living water “welling up within you.” When we start to live as the unique person God truly wants us to be, **there is a sense of “rightness” and we begin to see the “genuine abundance” of the lived-with-Christ life**. (theworkofthepeople.org)

**When we live with a heart turned towards God** – we live out God’s purposes for our lives and it glorifies our Heavenly Father. It is a witness to God and this is the abundant life that Christ spoke of in John: **“I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly.”** (John 10:10)

Three weeks ago, my family and I went on an epic road trip to visit several National Parks. Our goals were to see wildlife and to hike. We did just that. Throughout my life, I have found that being in nature helps me to notice the beauty of God’s – through creation, through stillness. The solitude of a hike in the woods can be time of walking prayer and thanksgiving. It just so happens that one of the most scenic drives in America is in Glacier National Park – the Going to the Sun Road. It runs east to west and through a high mountain pass with sheer drop-offs on one side and waterfalls on the other. It truly is spectacular and not an easy drive for those who have a fear of heights. The middle of this long road it comes to the top of a mountain high above the tree line where big horn sheep and rocky mountain goats roam. While we were there, the road was being resurfaced and so there was construction every evening. One night, driving this road, we had to stop and wait for almost 45 minutes before we could pass. On our right, was a beautiful waterfall of snowmelt. On our left, a sheer drop-off – the only thing between us and the bottom of the 6, 614 mountain was about 6 feet and a shin-high rock wall.

As we approached our stopping point for the construction, we looked to our left and noticed a beautiful white rocky mountain goat enjoying his little life walking on this very narrow ledge on the side of the road. More skilled than an acrobat on a tight rope, he sauntered by on the rock wall as if it was the easiest thing in the world to do. He was majestic and sure-footed and fearless about the thousand-foot drop-off to his left and indifferent to the cars on his right.

This mountain goat was doing exactly what God made mountain goats to do. I marveled at this goat in all of his glory and majesty and the humor of it all. We humans were stuck on the side of a mountain and the goat had no problem at all. The goat was in its element fully living abundantly as God created him to live --inspiring awe for all of us to see. This goat in all of his goat-ness glorifies our Creator. This scene with the goat, I’ll call him Billy, begs us to consider: Who are we and what are we to do and be?

The beauty that we see in creation and the beauty of a life lived as God designs draws our attention to our Creator God. . . this fully alive goat glorified God. St. Irenaeus captures this truth when he says**: “the glory of God is the human fully alive.”** Bear with me here . . . don’t think too much about me compare us to goats . . . When we live as God intends for us to live **it is honoring and glorifying to God.** With hearts turned towards God and actions that reflect the character of Christ, God is glorified. The fully alive human lives the abundant life that Christ talked about. And others are drawn to God by the ways in which we live our lives.

The parable ends with the warning against greed for all who are not rich towards God. **In this odd economy of God, our treasures and accumulation reveal our hearts desire**. Skipping down to v. 32-34 in Luke chapter 12, Christ encourages us to not be governed by fear and scarcity **but to give and share generously with those in need** for where our treasures are, so our hearts will be also**. Life lived richly towards God will always be manifested in our relationships with others and in relation to the needs of the world and the vulnerable.**

**Brothers and sisters, as we have been reminded again today with two more violent mass shootings (one in our own state), our world is groaning and deformed under the weight of violence, sin and despair. Families fleeing violence come to our border for refuge while violence continues to fill our lives in words and actions. Our world needs the church to engage with the hope of Christ – we cannot stay isolated like the rich fool -- as tempting as it is.**

This parable is about priorities. **Christ calls us out of ourselves and into his kingdom**. Living richly towards God has to do with our heart, our inner desires, our thoughts, and ALSO our actions. **As Christ modeled for us, our lives are not our own.** With hearts and attitudes turned towards God, **God’s work renews us for the sake of the world**. The passage from Colossians today reminds us that because of our baptism – because of our submission to Christ as Lord and Savior, **our attitudes and actions matter. *Paul says “set your minds on things above, not on the things that are on earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”***

The way we live,

what we think about, and

what we do matters to God.

Our actions and thoughts can hinder our relationship with God and thus others **or it can draw us closer to God.** Paul urges the Colossians to put away with a whole host of earthly desires and actions including immorality, impurity, greed, and also anger, wrath, and abusive speech.

**Although this requires tough inner work, the good news here is that God is an expert at bringing new life to dead places, remaking that which is broken.** This renewal process requires our consent and our participation as God changes and reshapes us. Paul reminds us that **God is renewing us from within so that we will bear the image of Christ – and our world desperately needs to see another way to live and to be.**

This is good news – It is good news - **that God wants to bring renewal and help us to live abundantly.** There is grace for all who are children of God. The Prophet Hosea reminded God’s children that God the Father loved them with the love of a good parent, and that no matter how rebellious, confused or wayward they were, God would never leave nor abandon them. **Through Jesus Christ we all have been given the right to be called children of God! Thanks be to God! God will never leave us nor forsake us.**

We will fail. We will stumble. We will give in to the things of this earth. Isolation, anger and, materialism will entice us. God, however, **continues to call us to repentance and to renewal**.

Being rich towards God is about a heart turned towards God **– always seeking God’s purposes in our lives, in our relationships and in our world.**

**It is about priorities** that impact our daily actions of extending love and grace to neighbor. Being rich towards God . . .  **is inner and it is outer.**

Thomas Keating writes that in centering prayer, we consent to God’s presence and work within us. So, may it be that we will consent to God so that God will do his great and hard work of renewal in each of us. **So, let us lay aside earthly things as the Apostle Paul wrote, and allow God’s love to renew us for God’s glory and the sake of this broken and groaning world.**

Amen.

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