

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 30-31, 2016
Luke 12:13-21

“Building Bigger Barns”

Opening Prayer

Loving God, all that we have comes as a gift from you: our lives, our loved ones, our futures. Yet we often treat your gifts as our possessions. We grab and grasp. We hold and hoard. We store up wealth for ourselves on earth but neglect what is the true treasure. How often do we consider our lives and houses full, but our souls are empty. You have created us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Forgive us for our selfish greed of gain. Help us put things into their proper perspective, to see what we have as coming from you, that we may cling to that which is eternal, rather than that which passes away. We ask all of this in the saving Name of Jesus. Amen.

The drama and hype of both the Republican National Convention and the Democratic National Convention are now over as we head toward the presidential election in November. One of the issues which both parties and presidential nominees are seeking to address is the economic challenge facing our country: stagnant wages for many households, the vanishing middle class, huge debt loads that college graduates have. These are very real and pressing challenges. That said, here are some things that may help put this into perspective: if you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in your pocket, then you are among the top 8% of the wealthiest people in the world. If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head, and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of the world’s population (<http://www.sermonsuite.com/#previews>). It does come down to seeing things in perspective, doesn’t it? Did the rich man in Jesus’ parable see things in perspective? Do we see things in perspective, or are we all about building bigger barns? In today’s message, we will consider Jesus’ parable about the rich fool from today’s Gospel under that theme, “Building Bigger Barns.” May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

Two weeks ago, we heard the story of Jesus’ visit to Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). Then, Jesus was asked to intervene in a family squabble between the two sisters, and now he’s asked to do the same between two brothers, one of whom says: **“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me”** (Luke 12:13). As with Mary and Martha, Jesus refused to get drawn into this family dispute. He calls the disgruntled brother and all who were listening to something more important: **“Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions”** (Luke 12:15). Jesus’ words are just as radical and counter-intuitive today as they were when He first spoke them. The truth is our society, our culture, our world measures worth, value, and importance by the abundance of possessions. The more you have, the more prosperous you appear to be. Very early on, kids discover how important it is to have the right look at school – the right clothes, the right shoes, the right brands. As adults, we long for that new car, the latest technology upgrade, or that larger home in a better neighborhood. But when is enough, enough? The desire for more, what we call greed, is deeper than just wanting the finer things in life. Greed is actually rooted in fear; fear of not having enough. This fear may be based in reality as when a person has gone through times of great need and knows from personal experience what it means to go hungry or not have a place to live. But the fear may also be more abstract, not rooted in reality at all, but driven by slick marketing. Jesus tells us that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions, but the world tells us it does. Who will we listen to? When is enough, enough?

The man in Jesus’ parable was a successful business owner. He was trying to make a good thing better and expand his holdings, which is not a bad thing in and of itself. His fields produced a bumper crop and

his existing barns and granaries for storing all the crops weren't adequate. That's a nice problem to have, and so he proposed to build bigger and better barns. But the question to be asked is this: to what end? What is the larger goal and what is the greater purpose of building bigger barns? That's pretty clear from what the man says to himself as he maps all of this out in his mind: **"... I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry'"** (Luke 12:19). For this individual, it was about a life of ease and comfort. The man in the parable was doing what any successful and prudent business person would do: planning for his future. We try to do the same by saving, watching our investments, looking for ways to secure our future. But that's exactly the problem: we can't secure our future through material things. It goes without saying that we have to live in this world and we need money to meet the expenses of living. But within us lurks the tendency to want more because whatever we have isn't enough. It's never enough. Hear what the Preacher says in the book of Ecclesiastes from today's Old Testament lesson: **"What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity"** (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23). So much truth in this, right? In our attempt to get ahead in life, we leave the house earlier and get home later. We work longer hours and travel more. We want nice things, but we're so busy we can't really enjoy those nice things or even our loved ones because we're never home. We become stressed out and instead of owning those things, they actually come to own us! Sometimes without even realizing it, we are building bigger barns. The words of the Preacher in Ecclesiastes ring true: **"I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind"** (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

So what do we do? Quit our jobs, sit back, and do nothing because "all is vanity and a striving after wind"? The rich man in Jesus' parable is called a fool not because he was rich and successful, but because he was not rich toward God. It was all about him. That's what greed can do to a person, leaving you with a lot of stuff on the outside but empty on the inside. And when we die, we leave it all behind because you really can't take it with you, which is why you never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul. Over against all this, Paul the apostle counsels us: **"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth"** (Colossians 3:1-2). The truth is, we have indeed been raised with Christ. He has redeemed us, not with gold or silver, but with his holy and precious blood, and with his innocent suffering and death. Our worth in God's eyes doesn't hinge on the size of our bank account, our investment portfolio, or how big our barns are. Our worth depends solely on what God, for Jesus' sake, has done for us. When the barn starts to rot and fall down, when the investments plummet, when the bank account shrivels up, then what? As Jesus tells us: **"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"** (Matthew 6:21).

Because we have been raised with Christ, the challenge before us each day is to seek those things which are above, putting to death whatever is earthly in us: **"sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry"** (Colossians 3:5). This side of heaven, our work in following Jesus and becoming more like him is never finished. It happens anew each day as we go back to what God first did for us in holy Baptism, where our old sinful self was stripped off, and we were clothed with a new self – a self that is seeking God's will, not our own. The old sinful self tells us: **"you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry"** (Luke 12:19). The new self, reborn in Jesus, asks: what would God have me do today? How can I use what God has given to me to bless others? How can his love be shown to others through me? And that is where we begin to join Jesus on his mission. So as we leave the house of God today, we do so trusting that in Jesus our value doesn't come from building bigger barns. Our value lies in God's love for us, who sent his only Son for us, and who will more than meet all our needs. Amen.