

Soul Investment

Luke 12:13-21

August 1, 2010; Tim Devine

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“Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”

I've never had a heart-to-heart conversation with my soul quite like this one from today's Bible reading. And even though it feels ultimately shallow, it also feels honest.

This parable is often called the parable of the rich fool. It is a story about a man building bigger and bigger barns to store his goods, or today we might say profits. And we might also think of his actions as hoarding, and doing this at the expense of those who had little.

We live in a world that is awfully good at promoting anxiety about things like this. We can never save enough. We can never have enough. We can never plan enough.

What we rarely hear is anything about the idea at the other end of the spectrum – we can never share enough.

Jesus' words might seem obvious, but they still very much need to be said: *“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”*

All the money in the world doesn't help the man in the parable when we hear God speak to him by saying: *“You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”*

UCC website theologian Kate Huey writes that “whenever we worship the created rather than the Creator, we have lowered our sights and limited our vision.”

In a consumer's world where we are told that we truly deserve everything that we might possibly want, the Biblical truth is far different. Over and over again we are told that everything we have is a gift from God. We may work hard for what we have, but in the end it is always a gift – not a reward.

And what about the rich fool in the parable? Kate Huey writes: “Here was a man obsessed with retirement planning. You might say that his first-century IRA's were fully funded. He had so much ‘stuff’ that he couldn't store it all, so he had to build more barns to keep it in. He definitely had more than he needed, but would probably never have as much as he wanted.”

The question that was asked of Jesus that led to the parable, is a question from someone of means, who stands to inherit something, and who sees a future of “things.” The

question was: *“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.”* And Jesus, being Jesus, provides a different answer than what the questioner was hoping for.

I think it is a hard thing for us to honestly see ourselves as among the “haves” in the world – those in the world with means and the sense of a hopeful future. And part of that is that we live out our lives generally far away from conflict. On the back of today’s worship bulletin is a story about ongoing fighting and difficulties in the African country called the Congo.

It is far away, and we might honestly wonder how we are connected to that particular place. Well, that country provides eighty per cent of the world’s coltan – which is a tar-like mineral that is used by cell phones, laptop computers, and pagers. None of these devices can operate without it. And much of the fighting is over control and access and profits around this unique resource.

Where we are economically in the world influences how we hear this parable. If we have means – the seduction is to be worried about the future, about losing what we have, and about getting more. If we do not have these resources – we are more worried about today and survival than about tomorrow.

“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

These words of Jesus are true. Wealth is not the same as happiness. Money and possessions in and of themselves do not bring peace of mind. The rich fool in the parable could plan out everything except for the time of his dying. And what did he have to show for all of his efforts? Friends? Respect? Honor? Wisdom?

It doesn’t seem so. The rich fool spent his lifetime investing in things, rather than investing in the soul that he chooses to address while so mindfully and maddeningly missing Jesus’ point when he says: *“Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”*

We didn’t hear it in our Bible reading this morning, but the lectionary also has Psalm 107 as a companion reading to go along with the Gospel. Our church school curriculum adapted it to be an additional piece with this morning’s message. Here is that Psalm, adapted in the followings way:

God has brought us back home.
When we journeyed through the wilderness,
wandering every pathway seeking after new riches,
thirst dried our souls,
hunger broke our being,
and our spirits fainted.
Then, then we knew there was nothing more –
there was nothing lasting.

We cried out to God.
God found us and held us in this truth:
when all things are finished,
and only the dust of the journey is left,
one thing remains,
God's steadfast love.
This, alone, is everything.
Let us give thanks to God.

All the possessions to fill the biggest barns cannot fill an empty heart. May stories and parables like this one today help us to open our hearts to the real treasures in life – love that lasts, songs that echo support and sustenance, and of life everlasting. Rather than storing up treasures only for ourselves, may we truly be rich towards God. Amen.

Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” And 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.”

Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ Then 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. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But 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?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.”