

August 3, 2025
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Exodus 16: 11-21; Luke 12:13-21
Treasures Stored

When we last left Jesus he was on the road to Jerusalem and had stopped to visit with his friends Mary and Martha in their home. Jesus encouraged Martha not to be preoccupied with worry and distractions and reminded her that “only a few things are needed—indeed only one.” Interestingly enough, Jesus did not identify what that “one thing” is, leaving it for Martha, and for us, to puzzle. As Jesus continues his travels, crowds gather to hear his teachings. Some of the most difficult of Jesus’ teachings, especially for those who are steeped in religious tradition, come in this section of scripture, Luke chapters 11 and 12. Jesus speaks directly about hypocrisy among the religious leaders and experts in the law, condemning practices by which those in power are rewarded, and those without, are trampled on. He talks to the crowds about how the kingdom of God is different - really reversed- from that established by humans. This morning’s scripture continues this theme of challenging us to consider what matters most to God. Hear now what is commonly called “The Parable of the Rich Fool” from Luke 12:13-21.

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, “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 Jesus 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 toward God.”

The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

“But what if the world doesn’t need more protection? What if it needs more presence?”¹

This was a question asked in a devotional I read this week by the Rev. Cameron Trimble. The devotion was about a conversation Rev. Trimble had at Gate B27 at the Denver airport with someone of a different political orientation than hers. The conversation meandered through the laundry list of divisive issues we could all name, and ended with a summation about domination, with the one individual seeing domination as a strength, a world view that sought to protect people and possessions, even if there was a side effect of violence and oppression. Rev. Trimble pushed back against this view, with the question *“But what if the world doesn’t need more protection? What if it needs more presence?”*

¹ Cameron Trimble. A Conversation at Gate B27. *Piloting Faith*. Online at: <https://www.pilotingfaith.org/p/a-conversation-at-gate-b27>

I have been pondering that question all week as I have sat with our story of faith for this morning. “What if the world doesn’t need bigger barns? What if it needs more presence?” I thought about this question as I read the articles and studied the graphs of the reams of economic data that were released this week: GDPs and employment figures and consumer confidence and tariff-related hits to car manufacturers.

I thought about this question because underlying all of the analyses we do, there is an assumption that there is a right answer, a correct pattern - sometimes so obvious we don’t even question it, like the rich fool in this parable. Too much stuff? Build bigger barns. Despite the success of downsizing and decluttering books and videos and the tiny house craze, we in the US are a people with more stuff than we have space for. As the website Governing proclaims, “The excesses of the American dream fill 50,000 storage facilities across the country. This material overflow results from crisis, indecision, laziness and selective forgetfulness.” They dubbed their photograph of rows of storage units: *Where Dreams Go To Die*.² Now I am not foisting a harsh judgement on the one-third of Americans who are using self-storage³— there have been times when I myself have needed it. Rather I was struck this week by the assumptions we are prone to make in our lives. And what these assumptions mean with respect to the stories of our faith. *But what if the world doesn’t need more possessions? What if it needs more presence?”*

We hear this echo in the Old Testament passage Beth read this morning. Moses tells the Hebrew people to gather as much manna as each person needs. And the people gathered just what they needed: “those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage.” They got part one correct. Good job. And then Moses told them: “Let no one leave any of it over until morning.” But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it became wormy and rotten. If the Hebrew people could have built storage barns, they would have. They didn’t see the irony of what they had left behind in Egypt where they had toiled making bricks for bigger and bigger buildings for the Pharaohs, evidence that the Pharaohs believed made them seem successful and powerful and mighty. How soon the Hebrew people forgot. Yet God saw with a different set of eyes. There is enough. Take no more than you need.

The words of preparation in the bulletin from the Rev. Dr. Tom Long challenge us to see with different eyes: “The rich man sees the world the way most people do. From his perspective, the crisis he faces is that he has too much of a good thing, too much stuff to store, and he does the best he can with what he sees: he builds more storage. But what if there is another way to see?”⁴

² <https://www.governing.com/context/too-much-stuff-americans-and-their-storage-units>

³ <https://www.storagecafe.com/blog/self-storage-demand-and-trends-2025/>

⁴ Thomas G. Long, *Proclaiming the Parables. Preaching and Teaching the Kingdom of God*. Westminster John Knox Press. 2024; p285

And what is this other way? The Gospel of Luke is known as the Gospel of reversal. From the Magnificat where Mary sings that her son will bring down the powerful from their thrones and lift up the lowly; fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty; to Jesus' own words in the beginning of his ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"; to the parables of the Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, The Lost Sheep and Lost Coin to the Rich Man and Lazarus to our tale this morning known as the Parable of the Rich Fool, we hear that the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

Yet when the Gospel of Luke was written some 50 odd years after Jesus' death, there had been no reversal. The Roman Empire was in control, having destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Tom Long says it this way: "But, for all of Luke's fanfare about a world being turned upside down, perhaps Theophilus (to whom the Gospel was addressed) was beginning to wonder if such promises were, to quote Macbeth, but "sound and fury, signifying nothing." ... But Jesus lived and died. Easter has come and gone, and, as Matthew Skinner observes, "When the Gospel narrative ends, the powerful remain on their thrones and the rich still enjoy full stomachs."⁵

Rather than being despondent over this current state of affairs, Long asks us to look beyond what the world sees and see what God sees. See where God is acting. He says: "Instead, cast your eyes where you normally would not look, out into the wilderness, in an out-of-the-way place ... If one wishes to see God at work, then one needs to look not where historians usually focus, but at the edges and margins...The point is not that God works only at the margins, leaving the main arena under the sway of corrupt powers. No, Luke is confident that ultimately the powerful will be pulled from their thrones and that the weak, poor, and lowly will finally be lifted up in God's kingdom. But what God is doing now to turn the world upside down, this great reversal, can be seen only with a side glance at the borders and peripheries. Want to see what God will ultimately do in Washington, Beijing and all palaces of power? Then look now at what God is doing to give life and to bring hope in overnight shelters, soup kitchens, and hospice rooms."⁶

But what if there is another way to see? But what if the world doesn't need more possessions? What if it needs more presence?

Our parable began with a request from someone in the crowd: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Jesus could have approached this from a number of angles – from following the laws of inheritance to the principles of fairness to encouraging generosity. All logical approaches. And yet Jesus cuts to the quick and warns against greed and a focus on abundance of possessions. And then he tells the story of the rich fool.

⁵ Ibid p250

⁶ Ibid p251

Our rich fool says this in relation to his struggle to contain his abundance: '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.'

And God says 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 toward God."

But what if there is another way to see? But what if the world doesn't need more possessions? What if it needs more presence?

The man is a fool because he is "not rich toward God". And what does it mean to be rich toward God? In the following verses in Luke, Jesus explains that being "not rich toward God" means living as if God were not present, as if God was not working to reverse the power structures of the world. As if the value of our life and the value of our community and the value of our country depended on the size of our barns. As if our prayers reflected a narrow definition of poverty and wealth, of scarcity and abundance. As if our prayers exposed a desire for more and more, because we didn't understand that being created in the *imago dei*, in the image of God, meant that we are enough.

A number of years ago, four pilgrims from my home church in Louisiana went to Bangladesh to visit mission co-workers supported by the congregation. While we prayed for those in Bangladesh, the Bangladeshi Christians prayed for us in America. A congregation member expressed to me her shock at the latter – for what possibly could someone in America need by way of prayer from someone in the poor reaches of Bangladesh. I wish at the time I had recognized truth in our parable of the rich fool. What if the forgotten truths and neglected graces of our faith are the prayers asking to be released from the bondage of our assets; prayers for those whose success does not satisfy, prayers when we feel too entitled and too comfortable, becoming isolated and elite? What if the world needs less possessions and more presence?

In a few minutes, we will come to feast at the table Jesus has prepared for us. We come to feast on the presence of our living Lord, an abundant presence. To store the treasures of God's love and grace in our hearts and lives, so we may be present with God and with each other. Taste and see that the Lord is good. May it be so.