



Sermon Series: “A Visit to the Good Physician”

“Do I Have To Clean Out the Barn?”

Preaching Text: Luke 12:13-21

4 August 2013: 11th Sunday after Pentecost

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My friend, Carol Norén, pointed out that Robert Bellah’s *Habits of the Heart*, describes an attitude that the hero (or anti-hero) of our story possessed. The attitude was described as “Sheila-ism.” Sheila was a woman in one of Bellah’s case studies who acknowledged no external point of reference in spiritual or moral matters. She believed in “my own little voice . . . just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other.” Sheila thought she was a religious, ethical person if she clung to these internal (and entirely subjective) principles. There was no point of reckoning outside herself, no judgment from a righteous and holy God. See if you can detect this attitude in Luke’s character in the Parable of the Rich Fool:

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” 14 But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” 15 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.” 16 Then he told them a parable:

“The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ 18 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. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ 20 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?’ 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God” (Luke 12:13-21).

Let’s draw two prime topics from our reading. The first topic pertains to possessions. Note that a man asks Jesus to settle a conflict he has with his brother. It is much like Martha’s plea to Jesus when she asks him: “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me” (Luke 10:40). But in this case Jesus shrewdly changes the focus from possessions to one’s attitude toward them.

People often asked Jesus direct questions and received for their trouble nothing but a story. It was not an unusual question, for even people today in settling family



estates commonly rely on judges and courts to settle such matters. But rather than play the role of judge, Jesus warns listeners to beware of greed because “one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” Luke here offers his Gospel readers a stewardship lesson.

Jesus’ parable, the “rich fool,” implies that anything that replaces God pushes a person toward idolatry. Although Jesus does not explicitly use the term “idol” or “idolatry,” savvy readers recognize that at stake is idolatry. In this parable barns symbolize money in Luke’s telling about a rich, but foolish man.

In modern culture money has certainly become a god we worship—perhaps no different than in antiquity. Faithful stewardship overcomes a temptation to become possessed by possessions—and biblical writers knew that money is a god that never satisfies. Ecclesiastes noted long ago this: “The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain” (5:10). The stewardship question may well be “when is enough, enough?”

Jesus’ antihero in the parable seemed to have no larger life purpose than to build bigger barns. If he was intent on storing grain to feed the hungry, then he would have had a realistic stewardship cause. Yet the parable’s context suggests he wanted “bigger barns” for the simple purpose of having “ample goods laid up for many years.” Then he could say, “relax, eat, drink, be merry.” His barns were frankly for his security. Cautioning believers about the last days, 2 Timothy prophesies as a warning: “people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy . . .” (verse 2). When people seek security in anything but God, then idolatry flourishes. For this man, barns are money.

Money matters to Luke’s Jesus—that is undeniable, yet more is involved here than how much one manages cash. The issue is not so much investments and dividends as it is distractions (*Feasting on the Word—Year C, Volume 3*).

Thus, a second topic that Luke addresses is the concept perspective.



Perspective helps us with our propensity to distraction. At times people ask us to put things into perspective. It helps us focus. An unconscious perspective many of us hold assumes everyone looks at things as through our eyes, our feelings, our concerns, and sustains our issues. Yet the day we discover that although we think we are the center of the universe, but we are not, that is the day we begin to grow up and mature as a person.

Try this on as a matter of perspective:

#1 Dear Abby: Our son was married January. Five months later his wife had a ten-pound baby girl. They said the baby was premature. Tell me, can a baby this big be that early? --
Wondering

Dear Wondering: The baby was on time, the wedding was late. Forget it.
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Or: #2 When Goliath came against the Israelites, the soldiers all thought, "He's so big we can never kill him." David looked at the same giant and thought, "He's so big I can't miss."
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Or: #3 How Do You Look at It?

A shoe manufacturer who decided to open the Congo market sent two salesmen to the undeveloped territory. One salesman cabled back: "Prospect here nil. No one wears shoes." The other salesman reported enthusiastically, "Market potential terrific! Everyone is barefooted."

We are here for good has to do with who we are for community and what our mission is to the immediate neighborhood in which we live. God gives us our possessions to steward and share in some way or another with God's world. Second, our perspective on our mission shapes who we are as Christians.

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