

"Foolish Trust"
Pentecost 11, Luke 12:13-21
July 31, 2016, CUCC, Buena Vista, Colorado
Rev. Rebecca Kemper Poos

I. ONCE UPON A TIME

Once upon a time.

Once upon a time, there was a man. A *very* successful man. A Bill Gates kind of successful! Man, he had *so* much. So much money, so many abundant crops. So many servants and contractors and sub-contractors—all working under him. Answering *to* him.

He lived in quite the McMansion. He had the state of the art security system, the best guard dog on the planet. Even a lock on his fridge and his snack cupboard! You just can't be too sure, you know.

His barns, where he stored all the really good stuff—his overflowing crops and farming equipment and tools—that was even where he had Sleeping Stalls for his many workers! Well, those barns—were getting a little maxed-out. His wealth was causing a crowding problem. And what a great problem to have!

Once upon a time, there was a man. And the man consulted his Staff about what to do. They had a Board Meeting around a big 'ol table and brought in coffee and a catered lunch. And put their heads together, to decide what to do.

And the man started the meeting with an address to the Staff:

"SELF! 'What should I DO, for I have no place to store my crops?' And Self and he consulted. Then he answered himself. SELF! '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 a brilliant Business Plan was proposed, seconded, voted on, approved, recorded in the minutes and implemented!

And the Staff (Self) stood up from the Board Meeting, slapping themselves on the back, toasting him, and affirming what a brilliant thing they had come up with: Build.Bigger.Barns! Of course! What a strategy!

But then.

But then. God rained on his parade. Came in like a real wet noodle and tore apart the man's Business Plan, line by line, page by page.

'You fool! (God was pretty nervy, calling this High Society Mover and Shaker a fool!) This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will *they* be?'

II. WHAT THE STORY IS ABOUT—AND NOT

Once upon a time.

Once upon a time, a *lot* of sermons and commentaries and internet blogs were written about this story and the "greedy rich man". They were great Stewardship Sermon fodder (as if we *needed* a Stewardship sermon in the middle of the summer—well, maybe we do and maybe we don't!)

Oh, the foolishness of wealth, we preachers preached. Of building up possessions so plentiful that you need to build more storage units. Shouldn't the man tithe to the church instead? Up his pledge? Go to the mission fundraising dinner?

But, once upon *this* time, we might consider—just for a moment—that the perils of wealth, or a reminder that "you can't take it with you" might *not* be what this story is about. Not what Jesus was hoping we would think about—in that moment. Just for a moment.

III. STOCKPILING ISOLATION?

What if the man was called a fool, *not* because of all his money and storage plans; *not* because he was talking to himself (!); not because he thought retirement really *could* be that “easy breezy” and he could just laze around and not lift a finger till the end of his days?

David Lose suggests that the issue here is not about the farmer’s wealth, but his isolation.

“Consider the little conversation he has with himself. Except it’s not just *to* himself, it’s also *about* himself...and *only* himself. There is no evidence that there is anyone else in his life, anyone else he should care about, anyone else who might have contributed to, or benefit from this bountiful harvest.

“Instead, confronted with the blessing of an abundant harvest, all he can think of is what he should do to make sure he gets the most out of it so that he can live comfortably into his old age.

The farmer falls prey to the notion that he can secure his own future. That he needs no one, depends on no one, and can go it alone. Which is why God calls him foolish. Because, in the end, not only is he not immune to death, but he will die alone, and all that he has stored up will not comfort or protect him, nor will it go to others who loved and respected him and can put it to good use, but instead it will all turn to dust in the wind.

“So perhaps this parable is really about community, the community in which we find sustenance and comfort and help and hope, and the community in which and through which we experience life with God.”

If you think that’s a stretch, then let’s look *behind* the parable for a moment. How did this all *start*? Why did Jesus even tell this story? Because two brothers haven’t even got dad in the grave, and they’re *breaching* community, not loving their neighbor, thinking only of themselves. They’re also asking Jesus to play referee for them—kind of an odd job for the Teacher! (or

is it? If you’re a teacher, this may be common!)

The brothers are asking for fairness, yet division. The rich fool is planning to divide himself, separate even further from the rest of the world. He plots to build bigger silos so he can further separate himself from the rest of the low-lives and guarantee a trouble-free and actually neighbor-free living out of his days.

Lose continues: “How do *we* hear Jesus’ words today? As speaking to us? Because there is, right now, a profound and increasingly shared message out and about that we *should* not and *cannot* trust each other, that the world is increasingly dangerous and we should therefore be increasingly afraid. That kind of fear will not lead us forward.”

[In fact], the Bible warns us against fear because it’s really hard to care for your neighbor and create a community when you are afraid.

“Don’t get me wrong. Community is not easy. It means putting up with people who disagree with you and annoy you and even have hurt you. Forgiveness, as well as trust, is vital. But this is God’s will, that we “not be alone.” And I think this farmer who was rich in possessions but absolutely dirt poor in relationships never got that message.”

"Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed," Jesus says. I think we have most often taken that to be about “stuff.” And the wanting to stockpile possessions. But what if it’s a warning against stockpiling privacy, separation, isolation? About pulling ourselves back behind the walls of our bigger barns, safely tucked in our sheltered sheds and clubs, not *too* bothered or disturbed by the world around us?

IV. BIGGER BARNS/TABLES/COMMUNITY

There is a truth—circulating in the airwaves. I don't know who said it originally, but its wisdom is profound in just 15 words:

When you have more than you need, build a bigger table, not a higher fence.

It might just be that we are all rich fools at times. Putting our trust in bigger barns and walls and separation, as if THAT is how we could secure our present and our future? As if more abundance means the need for more safeguards?

When we have more than we need—and even if we don't *think* we do—what if we build a bigger, longer, wider more accepting table? What if, instead of building bigger barns, the man reached out and turned his crops into a community garden?!

V. PARABLE OF THE DOORS

John Pavlovitz: A Parable for the Church (Adapted)

One day, a boy was walking through the town with his father, just as they did every Sunday morning.

He so enjoyed their walks.

The boy held his father's hand as they traveled from street to street, taking in every color, every sound, every scent of the new day.

As they walked together, the boy loved to look at the people as they passed by; so very different, so not at all the same.

They were beautiful and sweet and strange and sometimes even *scary*.

Whenever they happened upon someone, whether the boy thought they were beautiful or sweet or strange or scary, his father would always look them in the eyes, smile and say something nice to them.

Sometimes the people would smile back.

Sometimes they look surprised.

Sometimes they looked away quickly.

And on this particular morning, the boy finally turned to his father and asked, "Why do you do that, Father? Why do you greet everyone in the street with a smile and something nice to say?"

Everyone needs to be seen" his father told him, "to be seen and to know that they matter."

This pleased the boy. He thought that sounded very nice. He secretly wondered whether people thought *he* was beautiful or sweet or strange or scary.

That day, as they passed row after row of buildings that all looked rather the same, they came across one that was quite different from all the others.

It stood out because its doors were much bigger than the doors on the other buildings in the town; so big in fact, that they reached from the ground, far higher than the boy could even see, and so wide that their hinges on either side weren't even visible to the left and to the right.

"What *is* this place, Father?", the boy asked, still marveling at the great doors stretching into the clouds.

The father replied, "This, my son, is The Church That Will Be."

The boy looked again to the strange building and wondered out loud, "Why are its doors so big?"

He smiled at his son and said, "The Church That Will Be, *must* be the building with the biggest doors, because it needs enough space to welcome the whole world. It's designed so that all people can come in and feel at home; all the beautiful and sweet and strange and yes, even the scary people.

So it needs doors big enough for the world to enter."

“In fact”, he said, “if you look closely, you will find that every person you meet, deep down is equally beautiful and sweet and strange and scary. The Church That Will Be is a place for all of them.”

As he listened to his father speak, the boy’s eyes grew wide and his heart began to beat faster and faster, “Let’s go in!”, he shouted excitedly. “Better still, let’s open these great big doors, and tell all the beautiful, sweet, strange, and scary people passing by that they are welcome and to come inside and we’ll all have a party.”

“That sounds wonderful son, but we can’t do that quite yet,” the father said. “This is The Church That Will Be. It is not yet finished. It is not altogether ready.”

The boy felt a sadness in his heart, upon hearing his father’s words. He was so looking forward to seeing those massive doors swing open, and to telling everyone that passed by that they were welcome to come in, just as they were; beautiful and sweet and strange and scary.

“When will The Church That Will Be, be ready?”, the boy asked. “I’m not sure”, his father answered. “I was hoping it would be ready long ago. It’s been taking much longer than I’d like.” They continued walking together.

As they passed more and more rows of buildings that all looked rather the same, they came across another that was quite different, too. Only *this* one had doors much smaller than all the rest; oddly small, in fact. Its tiny doors were heavily bolted and locked, with chains wrapped all around.

A very serious looking man, stood in front of the building, guarding the small doors and nearly blocking them from view. As they stepped closer, the boy noticed a fancy sign on the small doors that read:

**BEAUTIFUL AND SWEET PEOPLE ARE WELCOME HERE.
STRANGE AND SCARY PEOPLE ARE NOT.**

The boy once again felt sadness in his heart. He wondered how they decided who was beautiful and sweet, and who was strange and scary.

He felt bad for those chosen as strange and scary people, the boys and girls who might walk up to this building, read the sign, see the very serious looking man and the small bolted and locked doors, and know they are not welcomed there.

He worried they would never feel seen and never know that they mattered.

“Father, the boy asked, “what is this building with the fancy sign and the serious-faced man and the very small, locked, guarded doors?”

The father looked at the boy sadly, and said, “This, my son? This building, with the fancy sign and the serious-faced man and the small, bolted and locked and guarded doors? This is The Church That Has Been. And Some Days Still Is.”

That day, the boy decided that he was going to become a builder.

He looked at his father and said, “The Church That Is, isn’t good enough. Its doors are not at *all* big enough. I’m going back to help build The Church That Will Be.

We’re going to finish that building with the *biggest* doors, and then we’re going to swing them wide open and tell all the people that pass by; all the equally beautiful, and sweet, and strange, and scary people, that they’re all welcome!”

The boy’s father looked and him, smiled a smile as wide as those doors and said, “My son, I can’t wait to see it.”

VI. FOOLISH TRUST

If we want to build bigger, longer tables, instead of bigger barns, we have to learn where our security lies. It does not lie in “having more” than the other guy. It does not lie in stockpiling our defenses and fences and walls and foolish beliefs of superiority.

It lies in trusting in the God who chose the foolish things of the world to fool the wise. Who turns the tables upside down in order to challenge the hoarding and corrupting and gate-keeping that our human systems create and perpetuate.

Trust of the most foolish kind is a trust that keeps the faith even when we confront death way sooner than expected; when we confront challenges and struggles in life that we haven’t anticipated, and have not been able to build bigger barns against.

When our prayers are not answered in the way we think they should be, what then do we trust in? When our false pockets of security; our best-laid plans wash out in the storm, it is then that we must cling to “foolish trust.” Then that we reach out in faith to a God who creates, loves and claims us in *spite* of all our foibles and chasing after folly. THAT is the only thing we can truly trust—that we are beloved children of God—one and all—and saved by grace alone—outrageous grace. NOT by anything we do or plan or stock up or invest in or store carefully or legislate against.

In a moment we will sing:

When You don’t move the mountains

I’m needing You to move

When You don’t part the waters

I wish I could walk through

When You don’t give the answers

as I cry out to You

I will trust, I will trust, I will trust in You!

Rev. Mike Denton on Trust:

Dear God:

Trust requires some sort of surrender or some sort of letting go or some sort of humility or some sort of simple-ness

That I’m not always certain

I have.

I have trusted you when I’m out of other options but living into it is too rarely my first option.

It doesn’t help that, too often, what some call trust has actually been a test

for You to pass or fail.

I am not certain what I should leave to trust.

Help me to figure it out.

Please.

(and, so,

I take

some sort

of first step) Amen.

VI. A FOOLISH BUSINESS PLAN

Oh, God. Teach us to trust foolishly, stepping out in faith, beyond our walls, our doors, our Board Rooms, our isolation and self-made Business Plans into the great unknown. Lead us to build bigger tables instead of bigger barns and walls. To follow you wherever our abundance is taking us. Amen.