The Parable of the Rich Fool
Luke 12:13-21
8th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C August 3 2025
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Good morning, friends. We hope everyone is enjoying the summer and able to take some time to rest and perhaps visit with those who are dear to you. May you find extra time to spend with God.

Last week we explored Jesus' teaching on prayer in Luke 11:1-13. As we move into chapter 12, he is teaching thousands of people (12:1). As he was speaking, someone stepped from the crowd to ask Jesus to mediate a dispute between this person and his brother. What we know is that this man wants Jesus to tell his brother to divide the inheritance. Although he is not identified as a male, we make that assumption because the firstborn boy inherits a larger share of the family's wealth. Only in rare circumstances do women inherit anything. Jesus refuses to get involved in this family's affairs. Instead, he tells a parable about greed. The Teacher wants to make clear that our lives are not about possessions, but rather, we need to be rich toward God.

In Luke 12:16, Jesus launches into a parable about a wealthy farmer. His crops were so abundant that he needed more space to store them. In his mind, this seems like an easy fix: he'll tear down the inadequate barns and build larger ones. With so much on hand, the farmer thinks that he can live the Epicurean lifestyle: "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow, we may die." Nice try, Mr. Farmer, but the problem is that you aren't in charge here—God is. And God's plan is for you to die tonight! The goods the farmer has laid away will not be of any value to him on earth. Nor will they be any help in the afterlife, because this man, rich as he appears on paper, is impoverished before God.

So, is this parable teaching us that we shouldn't plan ahead, that we shouldn't have some savings for a "rainy day"? I don't think that's the message here. Jesus is telling his audience that those things we possess—crops, barns, whatever—are all fleeting. Our possessions—or our very lives--may be here today and gone tomorrow. No sense in being greedy about the things that do not last. Instead, we need to seek first the kingdom of God. Whether we are rich in earthy treasures or not makes no difference. in the final analysis, our possessions here on earth are just temporary. They don't leave when we do.

If you watch the British show, "The Repair Shop," you may be reminded that these even special treasures wear out. Master craftspersons are

needed to restore them. And it's amazing what a great job they do. Even so, that trumpet that was so important to Uncle Harry or that tea set that Nana adored, can conjure up memories of these beloved persons, but cannot bring them back to life. What they once loved had to be left behind as they moved on to eternal life. Whether it's a piece of jewelry or a barn full of crops, the reality is that you can't take it with you.

Lest we think that only first-century farmers have this problem of lots of work that yields too much stuff, let's take a look at this story recounted by Rev. Marc Axelrod in his sermon, "Jesus Came To Set Us Free From The Grip of Materialism":

> John Ortberg tells the story of a successful businessman. He worked 14 hours a day, even on weekends. He thought the 40 hour work week was such a good idea he would often do it twice a week. His goal was to be the best businessman he could be. Even when he wasn't at work, his mind drifted toward his work so that it was not only his occupation, it was his preoccupation.
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> His wife tried to get him to slow down. She knew that they weren't as close as they used to be. But because of his work, he hardly ever gave her any time. He gave at the office.
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> In the back of his mind, he knew that his kids were growing up, and he was missing it. His kids complained about the ballgames he missed, the meals around the table he missed, the school concerts he missed. After a while, they stopped complaining because they figured he was never going to change.
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> The businessman told himself, "I'll be able to spend more time with them when things settle down. Besides, they have a nice house and nice clothes and cool video games because of my job! Everything I do, I do for them!" Deep down, he knew that he would be living this way even if he didn't have kids. But it made him feel better to say it anyway.
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> He also knew he wasn't taking care of himself the way he should. His doctor told him he had some serious warning signs—high blood pressure, high cholesterol. The doctor told him to cut back on the sweets and the fast food.
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> But instead, the businessman stopped going to the doctor. He said "There will be plenty of time for that when things settle down."
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> His wife tried to get him to attend church. But he said, "Sunday is the one day I get to crash! It's the one day I get to

sleep in! I don't have room in my life for God and the church. There will be plenty of time for that when things settle down."

One day, the president of the company said "We have a new account with the Kohler company! We're going to be rich! We have a lot of work to do over the next year or so. But it will be worth it!"

Later that night, the businessman tells his wife "Do you realize what this means? We can relax! We can take life easy! We'll be able to take that vacation you've been talking about!"

But his wife said "I've heard this speech before."

Besides, there was one small detail the businessman had overlooked. An artery that had once been as supple as a blade of grass was now as dry as plaster. The blood cells could barely squeeze through. Each day, while the man anxiously watched the stock market and stressfully did his work, the artery accumulated more and more plaque.

Later that night while he was hunched over the computer, his heart skipped a beat. Then another. Then another. He gasped for air. He clutched at his chest. And he fell asleep.

His wife woke at 3 a.m. wondering, "Where is he? Why isn't he in bed yet?" She sees him slumped over his laptop. She says, "Figures. He'd rather sleep at his desk than come to bed.

She touched his arm, and she realized how cold he was! She panicked! She called 911. They came to the house. They told her that he had a massive heart attack and that he'd already been dead for hours.

People came from all over to attend the funeral. His work buddies said, "He was a great leader! A dedicated worker! A good man!"

The company paid for the business man's headstone. It said, "Here lies Barry: A visionary! An innovator! An entrepreneur!"

But later that night, God sent an angel to the headstone. There, the angel traced with his finger the word God had in mind to describe the life of this wealthy, successful businessman. Fool. God said "You fool! This very night, your life will be demanded from you. Who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"

This is a modern version of the story Jesus tells in Luke 12. Jesus was very frank in his diagnosis. He didn't say the man was wicked. He didn't say the man was evil. He simply says, "You

fool."

Why does Jesus use this harsh word? The man didn't deliberately set out to alienate his wife and kids. He didn't deliberately choose to become a self-centered, greedy man. He never said that he didn't believe in God. He simply devoted his life to the wrong things. He became too self-absorbed and too busy for the things that matter most. (end of quotation)

This story may hit home for some of us. Even if we are not as extreme as the successful businessman in this story, we can, like Martha who we read about on July 26th, become so distracted that we fail to focus on Jesus. For many people, the story of their lives is writ large in the number of possessions they have.

And that in itself creates another whole problem that we call hoarding. For some people, hoarding becomes a disease. They cannot let go of anything they own, even clothes that they have outgrown or no longer wear. Do you know anyone who still has children's toys in the attic, even though the kids are long gone and the toys are not in good shape?

Although Jesus' parable does not use the word "hoard," we have to wonder what would have happened if the man, who had far more than he needed, opened his barn—and his heart—to people who needed food. He talks to himself, but he makes no mention of anyone else. Unlike the businessman in our modern story, this man seems to have no family. Notice the number of times the word "I" is used in these few verses. No menti0n of another human being. And certainly, he makes no mention of God.

There are rich people in many parts of the world, but we Americans have a particular penchant for trying to "keep up with the Jonses." Even as young children, we are taught that we are to be strong, independent, hard workers. Seems like we're always on a merry-go-round, reaching for the brass ring—a car with more features; a larger home with top-of-the-line finishes; admission to an elite school for our children; and the list goes on and on. The problem comes in when we don't know where to stop. Did you know, for example, that as of mid-2025, there are billionaires with an estimated combined wealth of $6.8 triilion residing in the United States, according to Forbes? This makes our country the one with the most billionaires globally, even ahead of more populous China and India., exactly, needs all this money? And what do they do with it? Well, they could be helping the estimated 47.4 million people who live in households that lack the funds to have a secure stream of food during the entire year. Beyond that, Facts USA reports that around 23 out of every 10,000

Americans — 771,480 people — experienced homelessness in January 2024 according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). They take their survey on a single winter's night. This year, the number increased by 18% over 2023. Some people lose their home due to bankruptcy. About 66.5% of those who file for bankruptcy do so due to medical bills. Yet, in most cases, the super-rich go on, oblivious to the plight of their needy neighbors.

Jesus' point isn't that we can't have nice things or live comfortably. But he is clear that those who are hoarding their possessions and not concerned about people in need are not paying attention to God. The Bible teaches us to love God and love our neighbors, no matter who they are. We may need to do some sacrificial giving to help someone in need. We may also need to stand with vulnerable people, such as the widow, the orphan, the immigrant.

You have two challenges this week. First, spend some time reviewing your "stuff." Are there things you could give away, perhaps clothes to the Goodwill or food to a food bank, to help others in need? Are you willing (and able) to pledge some funds to a non-profit organization that will help the neediest among us?

Your second challenge is to meditate on these questions:

Do you work to live, or live to work?

How do you know?

What strategies do you use for finding a work/life balance, which the businessman in our story obviously did not have?

Keep the main thing (your relationship with God) the main thing.

Much love, Nan