

Proverbs 23:4-5
 Luke 12:13-21

25th Sunday After Pentecost
 Midway Presbyterian Church
 November 14, 2021

A Foolish Farmer

Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson

Generally, the Book of Proverbs assures that wise living will be rewarded with a measure of prosperity, but warns about making wealth the goal of one's life. Listen to these words from Proverbs 23:4-5...

Introduction to the Gospel Lesson

Our Gospel Lesson this morning addresses the difficult issue of how Christians are to avoid the temptations of materialism in a very material world. Freedom from greed is the focus. A foolish farmer takes no account of God in his plans. Listen to these words from Luke 12:13-21...

Sermon

A newspaper carried this analysis of money matters:

If a man runs after money, he's money-mad;
 if he keeps it, he's a capitalist;
 if he spends it, he's a playboy;
 if he doesn't get it, he lacks ambition;
 if he gets it without working for it, he's a parasite;
 and if he accumulates it after a lifetime of hard work,
 people call him a fool who never got anything out of life.

This little story illustrates the fact that there are many different ideas about the use or misuse of money. However, we live in a world in which money is the usual standard of success. The more money a person has, the more successful he is deemed to be. Too often a person's success is determined by the answer to this question: "What is he worth?" It is clear that Jesus was opposed to a grasping life, outwardly a success but spiritually a failure. He said,

"One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." (Lk. 12:15)

Christian ideas on money have varied widely through the years. Some great men of the Bible such as Abraham and Solomon were rich. But Jesus and Paul were relatively poor. As Jesus said,

“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Mt: 8:20)

Paul was a tentmaker. Many outstanding Christians have known considerable wealth and been noteworthy philanthropists. Others have renounced money and called for people to get by on as little as possible.

We are surprised to learn that Christ had more to say about money than he had to say about repentance or rebirth. Money was the theme or in some way entered into the majority of the sermons and addresses of Jesus. One verse out of every six in Mathew, Mark, and Luke is on the subject of money. Jesus was interested in money because men and women are interested in money. We work for money. We inherit money. We spend money. We save money. We give money. And our use of that money reveals a great deal about us.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell the story of a rich young ruler who was unwilling to enter the Kingdom of God because of his great riches. Not money but the love of money.

And in our parable this morning Jesus tells the crowd about a wealthy but foolish farmer. This man was a prosperous landowner. There is no suggestion that his wealth came in any other way than by honest effort and hard work. By the world’s standards, he was very successful. His crops were so large that he said 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.” (vv. 17-18)

And apparently it was his great ambition to be able to then say to his soul, “Now I can just take life easy—eat, drink, and 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. (vv. 20-21)

There were two men at the funeral of a wealthy man. The first man whispered to the second, “How much did he leave?” The second man replied, “He left it all!” We always do, of course!

What this parable is really about is the First Commandment, which says,

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. (Dt. 5:6-7)

The man in the parable was an able man. It is likely that he stood well in the community. He was practical and thrifty. He was a man of influence and no doubt had the confidence of his friends. Jesus mentions no flaws in his moral character and finds no fault with his business methods. Neither did Jesus condemn him for his wealth. But there was one basic weakness that spoiled his life. His possessions took first place—they became his god. He lived for what he owned and could increase. He wanted more and more. And he became a victim of his own idolatry.

Note also that he could think of almost nothing but himself. For example, in the story he talked with himself about what he should do with his larger crops. In these forty-six Greek words the rich man referred to himself twelve times. The personal pronoun “I” occurs six times, and the words “my” and “you” addressed to himself are used another six times. His very language showed him to be self-centered. He showed no interest in what he might do for others with his bountiful possessions. His passion was simply to add to what he had.

Furthermore, he speaks of “my grain” and “my fruits,” making no mention of the seasons, the soil, the sunshine and rain, the cooperation of his workmen. He shows no

recognition of God's ownership of all things and no sense of being a good steward of what he had. Whereas, the psalmist declared,

The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;
the world, and they that dwell therein. (Ps. 24:1)

But we need to be aware that a person does not have to be rich to be a foolishly poor steward. Indeed, many a poor person is greedy at heart, focusing on things that other people have and coveting them. But no less than the rich or the poor is the person of the middle class subject to poor stewardship. An enterprising and ambitious person can easily come to measure success by the dollar sign and nothing else. A person of modest means can put generosity at the bottom of his priorities. He can think that if he only acquires this new technology, this new automobile, this new home, he will then be content.

Like the rich farmer, we are tempted to think that having large amounts of money and possessions stored up will make us secure. However, no amount of wealth or property can secure our lives, or protect us from a genetically inherited disease or a tragic accident. No amount of wealth can keep our relationships healthy and our families from falling apart. In fact, wealth and property can easily drive a wedge between family members, as in the case of the two brothers fighting over their inheritance at the very beginning of our Gospel Lesson:

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." (Lk. 12:13)

I recall a small church I served many years ago. There were two brothers in the church. And when their father died, there was unhappiness about their inheritance. If one of them were present at Worship, the other would not come.

Most importantly, no amount of wealth can secure our lives with God. In fact, Jesus repeatedly warns that wealth can get in the way of our relationship with God. "Take care!" he

says. “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (12:15).

It is not that God doesn’t want us to save for retirement or future needs. It is not that God doesn’t want us to enjoy what he has given us. We know from the Gospels that Jesus spent time eating and drinking with people and enjoying life. But he was also clear about where his true security lay.

Sadly, the foolish farmer failed to see the true values of life. And therefore he missed the joy of the quiet mind and the sympathetic heart. He knew nothing of the deep satisfactions of serving God and his fellowman. The attitude of gratitude. The peace of his eternal salvation.

This text has been paraphrased in these words: “Even though a person has plenty, it is not in what he owns that his true life lies.” The Greek word for *life* here means a person’s real, inner, spiritual self, as distinct from his mere bodily existence. That is, “a person is what he *is* and not what he *has*.” This is a key to Jesus’ whole teaching on the subject of money. “What is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world, and lose himself?” (Mt. 16:26) No, Jesus was not opposed to people owning money. He was opposed to money owning people. Jesus had good friends among the well-to-do. He did not require his followers to be poor. But Jesus knew that the good and fine things of the true self are not to be bought or measured by material things.

Our parable does not tell us that the man died because of the strain and overwork, to which he had been driven because of his greedy ambitions. But such deaths do occur every day. It is one of the great tragedies of our time that so many fine lives are sacrificed on the altar of gaining more and more.

Scripture is clear about this: Greed is a serious matter; God is the owner; man is the steward. This means a wise use of all that has been entrusted to us in the limited time that we

have on earth. It means supporting worthy charities and the church in its worship, work, and witness. That makes of money a useful and powerful tool for human well-being. It dedicates our talents to far greater goals than eating, drinking, and being merry.

The conclusion of the parable is significant: “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.” The self-centered, hoarding life that ignores God is self-defeating—foolish. But the Spirit-centered, outflowing life, whether it has much or not, is enriched and significant. The difference lies in our recognition of the claims of God on all of life. “For one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.