**The Barn Builder**

**Luke 12:13-21**

2/22/15

Thought for Meditation:

“What do you think it is that drives people to want far more than they could ever use or need? I frankly think it's insecurity. How do we let the world know that the trappings of this life are not the things that are ultimately important for being accepted?” *Fred Rogers*

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 Today is the first Sunday of Lent. Lent is a time we prepare for the events that take place in Jerusalem during Holy Week – especially the cross and the resurrection. Jesus spent most of his life and ministry in Galilee, in Northern Israel. At a point in time he travelled to Jerusalem. In chapter 9 Luke tell us that “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51).

 To get from Galilee to Jerusalem Jesus had to walk 60-80 miles through Samaria. Samaria was unfamiliar territory and not the friendliest of places. Jews and Samaritans were not on the best of terms. They had different religions and different cultures. Luke actually has ten chapters with Jesus traveling through Samaria. In those chapters Jesus told many parables. He used these parables, told in Samaria, to teach his disciples how to live faithfully in God’s kingdom, even as they lived in a culture that does not support living faithfully.

 What I’d like to suggest is that we live most of our lives in Samaria. It’s easy to be a Christian on Sunday morning, when you are at church. It’s easy to be faithful when you are surrounded by other Christians. The challenge for us is how we live from Monday through Saturday. How do we follow Jesus faithfully when we are surrounded by people who have different beliefs, different customs, and different goals than we do? During Lent I want us to look at some of these parables that Jesus used to teach the disciples, and see how they speak to us.

 Our parable for today is about the Rich Fool, or as I called him, the Barn Builder. Listen to our story. **“Luke 12:13-21.”**

 The request from this anonymous man wasn’t out of place. In the previous chapter Jesus had taught about prayer. “Ask, when you need help. Seek for the things you desire. Knock on God’s door and he will answer your prayers.” The man was doing exactly what Jesus had said and his request was in line with biblical laws about dividing up an inheritance. However, Jesus recognized that behind this request for justice there was a greater problem – greed, covetousness.

 Jesus responds by giving us one of those wonderful sayings that we all know, yet we need to spend a lifetime learning. “Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. Your life is not defined by what you own.

In 1999 John Travolta was in a movie called “Civil Action.” He played a lawyer who represented some people who were suing a large corporation. This corporation was dumping chemical wastes into a river and people were getting sick and dying. Unfortunately this lawyer and his small firm couldn’t match the millions of dollars that this corporation put into their defense. Travolta’s character used up all his financial resources. At one point he stood before a bankruptcy judge and declared that all he owned was fourteen dollars and a portable radio. The judge was amazed and he said this, “Where are all the things that you should accumulate in life in order to give you your identity?” We live in a world that tells us that we are defined by the things we own.

 There is a story of a very wealthy man who went to his funeral director to make plans for his burial. He wanted to be buried in gold Cadillac. Not gold paint – solid gold. Years later the man died and the funeral director followed his plans. A gold Cadillac was made. A large whole was dug. The man was placed in the front seat behind the steering wheel, with a $25 cigar in his hand. As a crane lowered the Cadillac down into the hole a bystander watched and said “Man, that is really living!” Life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions. We know that, but we need to keep learning that lesson.

 Jesus told a parable about a rich man who kept making more money. Everything he did turned out great. He planted his crops. It rained at just the right time. The sun was just right and the soil was perfect. His crop came in way beyond what he ever imagined. He built a bigger barn and figured that he had plenty to live out the rest of his life, so he retired. He bought himself a Lexus, a winter home down in Florida, figured he’d travel a bit, eat a bit, drink a bit, relax a bit, and enjoy himself. That night he died. The first words he heard from God were “You fool.” Not a very comforting message as you enter God’s presence.

 This man was not condemned for being rich. He was not condemned for being mean or unfair, for cheating or for doing anything illegal. He was condemned for one main reason. He only thought about how he would use his money for himself and not how he could use it to help others. This parable is only five verses long, yet in it this man refers to himself at least twelve times – I, me, my, myself. His problem was that he only thought about himself. He was at the center of his own world.

 One idea that is often missed in this parable is that God is very generous. The rich man in the parable was rich because God had blessed him. That’s who God is. That is what God does. We have also been blessed. We live in a world of great wealth, and let’s be honest, we are rich. Most of us don’t think of ourselves that way. We compare ourselves to Bill Gates or Warren Buffett. We may not be rich compared to the richest 1%, but compared to the other 99% of the world we have an abundance.

I don’t know how much money anyone here makes or how much anyone gives. But I am convinced that Sharon church does not have a money problem. I know that last year there was anxiety about whether we’d meet our budget, and this year is not much different. But it isn’t a money problem. There is plenty of money in this church. The problem is a stewardship problem, a faith problem. It is a question of whether or not we trust God enough to give generously to the work of God through the Sharon Church.

 A man saved up a great sum of money. He dug a hole in his backyard and buried the money. For months, every afternoon he went out to his backyard, dug up his money, counted it, and buried it again. One afternoon he was shocked to find that his money was gone. He began to cry out in despair. His neighbor heard him crying and came over to see what the problem was. When he explained the situation the neighbor said, “I don’t get all the fuss. Maybe the person who took the money will use it for something good.

 How are we using the abundance that God has given to us? Are we using it for our own glory and our own enjoyment? Or, are we using it to share God’s love and the material blessings of our lives with those who are less fortunate? Are we using our wealth to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ? Are we using our wealth to support the work of God through Sharon church or any other organization? Will we use our money to become rich toward God?

 Jesus ends this parable with another one of those pithy sayings. “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). By the world’s standards we are rich! God’s grace in Jesus Christ makes it possible for us to be rich toward God. I think we all have some idea what it means to store up treasures for ourselves. I have a bank account, an IRA and a pension. What does it mean to be rich toward God?

 If you look back over our passage you will see that Luke doesn’t tell us how the man who asked for justice with his brother responds. Jesus doesn’t tell us how the rich man in the parable responds. It’s left open-ended, so that we can decide how we will respond. Will we store up treasures for ourselves? Will we find our identity in the things we own? Or, will we be generous, as God has been generous with us, and learn to be rich toward God? How will you end the story?