

OVERFLOWING

The Rev. Geoff Parker to Foreside Community Church - Falmouth, ME

Friday, August 2, 2019

Scripture: [Luke 12:13–21](#)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCRIPTURE

Today, we're continuing on with a series of Jesus's teachings to his disciples and followers. As we continue down the never-ending political journey in our nation, it's fun to see these gatherings that are almost exactly like town hall forums with Jesus. People are always calling out questions or concerns from the back row.

Today, one comes from a person caught in a family dispute. He has real issue from his life that he would like help from Jesus... but Jesus has something else he would like to talk about.

SERMON

I think one of the reasons my mind went to a political town hall as an image this week is because Jesus does kind of pull off that political maneuver, "the pivot," in this story and parable. I do want to say that we never get any more information or clarity about the poor guy who shouted out his conundrum from the crowd. We don't know if his brother was being unjust in dividing the inheritance... we do know that eldest brothers got to do pretty much whatever they wanted... which wasn't super fair, we can safely say.

Instead of adjudicating what may actually be a justice issue for all we know, Jesus gets down to even more basics. He tells this parable, what is sometimes known as the "Parable of the Rich Fool." (Not how I want to be remembered.) Jesus tells this story, and essentially asks, who convinced us that we could own stuff, anyway?

The satirical, nasty, and definitely not-safe-for-church 90's novel and movie, "Fight Club," meant to poke at my generation's weird stew of consumerism and rebellion, told us: "The things you own end up owning you." At the very least, they make incredible demands on us. In the past 50 years, the average size of our homes has tripled. ^[1] 1 out of every 10 Americans use off-site storage rentals as a way to manage the excess. ^[2]

How about you? How's your stuff doing? How are you doing with it?

Jesus's teaching ministry was ingenious partly because it met his people where they were: an agrarian society organized around the family unit as the source of continuing capital. His stories and lessons engaged them right in the every day.

If we read this lesson carefully from the tender knife edge of existence that Jesus's followers knew, we recognize a fact that can sometimes slip out of our American Protestant work-ethic hearing: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly..." ^[3] What produced abundantly? The hard work and bootstraps of this rich man? Or the land that he was lucky enough to be possession of (maybe because of his wealth?)

The land produced abundantly, and the rich man is in position to benefit from it.

The foolishness of the rich fool is that, in the lucky situation of living on the land that has produced so much that his barns for storage are overflowing, (barns apparently able to hold enough product to make him already rich), his response is to build bigger barns.

The question at the heart of this story is that most elusive question in our lives, the question of *enough*. What is enough for us? When do our barns overflow, and when that happens, where do they flow to?

We are still learning to talk about faith and money in most places in this country. That makes it difficult for us to have these conversations with each other, and it makes difficult to even have these conversations with ourselves. But we owe it to ourselves, right? To have asked ourselves at the very least, "What is enough? How will I know when I get there? What then?"

I think we need to be careful here, because I don't want to call into question anyone in the room who has savings for retirement, or a college fund for a relative, or some money saved for some emergency... Jesus has a few things to say to preachers who have a log in their own eye going after the splinters in yours.

I also think there is a lesson for us in what barns mean for us in the ecology of our world. The lands produced abundantly, without consideration of ownership... it's just what the lands did. Our temptation is to divide and pen up that generative life. We can live in worry and self-security until we try to lock away what has been given in a pure gift of creation, dividing that which is ultimately one: one creation, one gift, one abundance.

The poet and thinker Wendell Berry knows this when he says:

When Jesus speaks of having life more abundantly, this, I think, is the life He means: a life that is not reducible by division, category, or degree, but is one thing, heavenly and earthly, spiritual and material, divided only insofar as it is embodied in distinct creatures. He is talking about a finite world that is infinitely holy, a world of time that is filled with life that is eternal. His offer of more abundant life...is to become conscious, consenting, and responsible participants in the one great life. [4]

The correct response, then, to the overflowing of life around us is to be a participant in that overflowing... sustaining ourselves, but also the web of all creation around us.

This is true for stuff, this is true for wealth, this is true for life... I also think, on this day, [5] we should be aware that we sometimes make safety and security into a finite resource. Store it up for ourselves, while others suffer with the violent consequences of our inaction, our unwillingness to insist that an abiding sense of peace should just flow...

But here's the thing: There is enough. There is enough when we are called into communities of love and attention to that life which is abundant... if we can create more of those communities, more of those moments, more of those invitations to overflowing... we will be reminding others, just as we are reminded every time Jesus welcomes us to this table to be fed... reminded that each of us is enough and there is enough for each of us...

There is enough, because Jesus insists on reminding us that those gifts which overflow our capacity are meant to bear witness to the abundance of God's love.

There is enough: we do not need more stuff, we need more friends.

There is enough: we do not need more weapons, we need more safety for all.

There is enough: we do not need higher walls from each other, we need homes for all.

There is enough: we do not need bigger barns, we need bigger tables.

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1. NPR - <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5525283?storyId=5525283> ↩
 2. NY Times - https://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/06/magazine/06self-storage-t.html?em&_r=0 ↩
 3. Luke 12:16 ↩
 4. <https://medium.com/the-badlands/wendell-berry-and-the-life-of-abundance-887b81c7a437> ↩
 5. Within 24 hours of this sermon, 29 people died in at least two mass shooting incidents in El Paso, TX and Dayton, OH ↩