

Lectionary 18C – 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

August 3, 2025

*Ecclesiastes 1;2, 12-14;2:18-23; Psalm 49:1-12; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21*

Grace and peace to you, from our God – Father, Son and Spirit!

Abundance...profusion...plenty...more than enough!

Whether we like to admit it or not, each of us has something...some things...that we'd just love to have more of – maybe even some thing or things we already do have a vast surplus of!

According to the Self-Storage Council of Massachusetts, we have 537 self-storage facilities, containing a total of 20,971,621 square feet of storage space, an average of 3.67 square feet per person...and that is not counting my garage!

When my daughter was about four, she was riding home with a neighbor for a play date. As the neighbor pulled into her driveway, she pressed the garage door opener, leaving my daughter agape. As she was about to explain the new gadget, my daughter gushed, "Wow, *you have a **car** garage!*"

Alas, although decades have passed and I have made a circular path to navigate around my still carless two car garage, it is still full of things: along with the water heater and tool chest, you will find my husband's soccer shirts, my son's baseball cards, my grandkid's baby stroller and toys, my old office and teaching supplies, camping equipment....well, you get the idea: lots of stuff...stuff each of us loved and maybe still loves, at least too much to part with.

Whatever age you are and whatever item you love having, it's a sure bet that there is always one more thing in that collection that you are missing...one more addition you'd really like to have...one more "if only I had....(heart's desire here!)" that would make the set and your satisfaction complete.

Except it wouldn't.

There is always just one more.

And that is just the point of Jesus' parable about the rich farmer...or the rich fool as it is sometimes called. His land holdings are vast: the word translated as "lands" in our text is one that suggests more than a simple farm, something more like an entire county composed of several tenant farmers, property vast enough to produce an especially abundant crop, given the right weather and enough seed.

He is so overwhelmed by this good fortune that he's ready to tear down the current storage barns and construct bigger and better ones. He's certain that he has won the first century equivalent of the lottery and is set for life. No more worry and no more work; just happily ever after.

But the life he imagines is coming to an abrupt end, and all that grain, all that wonderful abundance will not change the fact that his life is over.

It is deceptively simple to look in on this scenario and see that farmer's great faults, to decide that he is a fool to be so greedy, a fool to stash away more than he needs. It's easy to place him in the "rich guy getting his comeuppance" category or the "powerful magnate cheats his slave laborers" box. But the text doesn't say that...doesn't even hint at any malfeasance on his part.

We might indeed assume that the major point of the parable is for people who are rich to share more, to give more away, but again the parable contains no such admonitions.

Is it only his untimely death that makes him a fool? It can't be for celebrating his good fortune - after all, God created us to be fruitful and fill the earth, celebrating the abundance of creation himself even as he created! And the farmer's not a fool for storing the excess grain; good stewardship includes taking care of the fruits of the earth so that nothing is wasted. The grain will keep if it is properly stored, at least for a while. He's not a fool for planning ahead either, as any financial advisor and common sense will tell you. Carelessness is not a virtue to be found anywhere in scripture.

Where he falls on his face is in thinking that this abundance is his handiwork, and that this stockpile will guarantee him a long life and a secure future. In fact, he has a lot to say about himself: *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.'*

*My crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, my thoughts, my soul.* This is a one-man band, with nary a thought about family or friends, neighbors or needy, community or cosmos...and not a word about God or a word of thanks to God.

That is the trouble we face with money and possessions. It is so easy for them to become an end unto themselves...to become something we have achieved, something we deserve, something that blinds us to the hand of God in our blessings, and deafens us to the cries of the world around us. All of our things bind us to an endless treadmill of working harder to maintain what we already have and working longer so we can get more. Our things confuse

us into using our time and talent and treasure less and less wisely, for things that please us rather than what pleases God.

Too many things become more important than the people used to produce them...more valuable than the earth consumed to make them and more central than the God who has created them and blessed us with such a richly abundant life.

I cringe when I think of all that I have. The Tryggestad garage hasn't seen a car in decades and although I have been systematically going through box after box this year, I have barely made a dent. My refrigerator and pantry are full, and *Feed the Children* reminds me that my weekly food budget could feed a third world child for a month. I am humbled at all that I have and pray that I might somehow use it better, use it to make more of a difference.

And that is the second important point of this parable. Jesus does not condemn the farmer for being successful. He does not demand sackcloth and ashes instead of new barns. He does not forbid eating and drinking and being merry.

What Jesus does say is that we should be rich toward God rather than being rich for ourselves.

And so we are left with another question: what does it mean to be "rich toward God"?

In recent weeks we have heard some hints: the Samaritan was rich toward God by tending to the injured traveler, even though that traveler was a stranger and not of his clan. Mary was rich toward God by listening at Jesus' feet, rather than being lost in the busyness of meal preparation. The rudely awakened neighbor was rich toward God by getting out of his cozy bed and lending some food to the man with unexpected guests.

It seems as if we just need to keep our eyes and ears and hearts open to the people around us, and mostly, keep our eyes and ears and hearts focused on Jesus.

John D. Rockefeller, the wealthy oil magnate, was known for his hard line and some might say ruthless business practices. He worked hard, amassed a fortune and wielded great power and influence. But Rockefeller was also a philanthropist. He faced his own mortality in a debilitating illness, and learned to move that money out of his own barn and into the community, establishing a foundation that funds medical research, community projects, poverty programs and religious organizations.

Rockefeller was once asked in an interview about his vast wealth, and how much he thought was enough. He smiled and said, somewhat facetiously, *just a little more*.

Isn't that the truth! We always hope for the next step on the salary scale or the next rise in the stock market or social security or the interest rate... no matter how high it is right now. It is

true because no matter how much money or stuff we have, even if we have enough to give tons of it away, it will never be enough. It will never fully satisfy the ultimate emptiness, the yearning for wholeness and security. That answer is always God, God who created us and who holds us in love no matter how rich or poor we are.

We have only to look at the life and work and words of Jesus, a life of love and caring, words of justice and sharing, the riches of giving and receiving. We have only to trust that the most important and valuable asset we have – the only important and valuable asset – is the God who loves us.

Neither the rich farmer or nor Nelson Rockefeller were perfect individuals, model Christians or faultless leaders, and neither are you or I.

But no matter how much or how little we have we are all blessed abundantly, rich beyond measure regardless of our monetary worth or physical strength, our intellectual prowess or religious devotion. We are blessed because the One who created us gave us a world full of possibilities and a promise of eternal life. We are blessed with a vision of the kingdom of God and God's spirit to guide us along the way.

And that really is more than enough.

Amen.