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The Parable of the Rich Fool
Luke 12: 13-21

U Store-It Self Storage
Extra Space Storage
A-OK Self Storage
Storage USA

Just a handful of the hundreds and hundreds of listings in Memphis for self storage facilities.

According to the Self Storage Association which represents the *huge* United States self storage industry, at year end 2009, there were approximately 46,000 “primary” self storage facilities representing 2.21 billion square feet.

Let me repeat that –
46,000 self storage facilities
of 2.21 billion square feet
of **stuff** – *our* stuff.

What does that say about us that we pay *money* to store **stuff** we cannot live *with* but *think* we can’t live without?

And storage units are just a *piece* of the puzzle. What about garages that house everything *but* our cars? *Carless garages* – all because there is no room for our vehicles due to all our **stuff**. We have *walk-in closets* that are *overflowing* and attics *filled* with boxes and boxes of our **stuff**. We tear down homes to build McMansions – *bigger* homes in which we can we can store more **stuff**.

Have you started squirming a bit? Do any of the aforementioned examples describe *you*?

While I don’t rent a storage unit and I have not built a McMansion, I confess that *all else* – the carless garage, overflowing closets and filled attics - indict *and* convict me.

Yes; we are more like the rich fool in today’s parable than we would like to admit.

But we *shy* away from talking about money, wealth and possessions in church – **except** during Stewardship time of course. After all, we live in a society in which etiquette dictates that we *don’t* talk about the taboo topics of money, religion or politics in polite society so as *not* to offend.

But, **Jesus** was *far* from shy about speaking and teaching about money, wealth and possessions. With *so* many parables – *so* many bible passages – that specifically deal with such – how can *I* – how can *we* – **not** talk about these important topics???

So – I break the taboo. I hope *not* to offend anyone. But I *do hope* to **disturb** folks – as I have been disturbed. After all, the Gospel *intends and tends* to do just that.

So – I invite us all to drop our defenses. And to listen – listen with open hearts and open minds. Let the Gospel go within and stir up the **stuff** of our *souls*.

The rich fool was *not* a **bad** man. There is no evidence that he gained his land and wealth via dishonesty or oppression. And I regret that the word **rich** is used because a superficial reading and common interpretation is that Jesus is condemning wealth and possessions.

But *being rich* was *not* the man's sin. I believe his sins were that of *supreme self-centeredness* and *supposed self-sufficiency*. Common afflictions for *all* - of *all times* – then *and now* – and all people.

In the eight verses of this Gospel passage, the rich fool speaks of himself *again and again*. *Conspicuously absent* is **any** glory given to God who we know after all is the great, glad-giver of all good things.

Note the repeated use of the words, “I” and “my” throughout the Gospel:

“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. And **I** will say to **my** soul . . .”

Eleven times he refers to himself. *At no time* does he refer to God. Also, alarmingly absent is *any thought whatsoever* as to his *neighbor*. The rich fool thinks *only* of himself and his future – *no one else*. Instead of *sharing* the bounty with which he was blessed, he plans on how he can make *more* room for *more stuff* – for himself.

I disagree with some who think that he is suffering from the gangrene of greed. There is no hint of any motive that he is trying to deprive others by hoarding for himself or to grow in stature within the community by increasing his assets or building his *McBarns*. No; it is *all about him*. Not a fleeting thought is given to others – period. His is a very solitary existence *and future* – void of others and void of God – at least from his perspective.

His speech to his soul is proof that he foolishly seems to think that his *supposed self-sufficiency* will ensure his future security. He tells his soul – “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” There is *no* acknowledgement of God *anywhere* – either in the bountiful harvest or trusting in God's abundance for the future.

No; it is *all about him*. **He** acquired this harvest and **he** is securing **his** future by building bigger barns to store it.

He foolishly worships what has been called – the *unholy* trinity of **me, myself and I**.

The rich fool blatantly ignores the Great Commandment –

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

In ignoring such, he commits the sins of self-centeredness and supposed self-sufficiency.

And what happens next is unusual to this parable alone. God speaks directly. God, harshly says, “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.”

Or listen to this version from *The Message – The Bible in Contemporary Language*:

“Just then God showed up and said, ‘Fool! Tonight you die. And your barnful of goods – who gets it? That's what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God.’”

Yes; we are more like the rich fool than we would like to admit.

The *more* we make *more* room for *more stuff*, the *less* room we have for *God and others*.

We erect and fill our modern day barns for our harvests – our **stuff** -the storage facilities, carless garages, overflowing closets and filled attics.

Our U Store-It Self Storage is less about storage by Self and more about storage OF Self.

Rather than being *rich toward God*, we fall prey to the worries and fears of not having enough for the future. Unemployment has hit many of us and hovers over others of us. Real or feared medical bills haunt us. Retirement has been deferred for some. Retirement accounts have suffered for all. All are valid concerns. Times are hard. The future can be scary.

But we *must not* fall victim to living out of scarcity rather than abundance.

We *must not* fool ourselves into thinking that we can secure our future by storing away our present day harvest.

In preparing for this sermon, I kept thinking of a story shared by Deacon Drew Woodruff upon return from one of his trips to Haiti. Drew tells of how he and others in his mission group were handing out candy to the children. He said that it was *heartwarming* to watch the children gather around with outstretched hands and big smiles to excitedly accept the candy.

But it was incredibly *humbling* to see what they did next. Instead of instantly eating the candy themselves, they immediately went to share with the children who were disabled – who had been unable to gather round for the candy give away.

Unlike the rich fool in today's Gospel, they did not receive a bounty enjoy some of it and then store away the rest for themselves for a later time. No; their *first thought* was of *the other* – the less fortunate – the one among them in greater need.

Yes; we are more like the rich fool than we would like to admit.

The Gospel is indeed disturbing, but it also always bears Good News. The Good News here is that if we want a better ending than that of the rich fool, we can begin re-writing our own story *now* – this very instant.

May our entire lives –
our acquiring, spending, sharing and saving –
become testimonies of bodacious, bona fide, baptized believers being rich toward God.

May we be more like the Haitian children who are Christ-centered rather than self-centered.

We can do it! Not by ourselves that would be the sin of supposed self-sufficiency. But with *can* do it *with God's help*.

It will require some serious soul searching
some hard choices and life style changes –
a conversion of the heart.

Let's start now.
Begin downsizing.
Let go of some **stuff**.
Less **Self**. More **God**.

That is our ultimate savings plan.