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St. Paul’s Episcopal Church  

**The Rich Fool and the Endless Quest for Enough**

Every few days I come home from work to another Amazon package on my doorstep. I open the package to find a new baby item I didn’t know I needed, But apparently, I’m told, we can’t live without. Changing tables, newborn bathtubs, bottles, and – the latest thing I’ve learned about -- baby snot suckers. Friends from near and far have supported Joe and me in this journey with the gift of *so. Much. Stuff.*

As we enter our last month before Baby Dodson joins our church and the world, I find myself continually amazed by just how much this little creature inside of me is going to need.

And what gets me is that I realize this little baby’s material needs won’t stop any time soon. The needs will continue… 
New clothes. 
New technology. 
And it goes on and on into adolescence and adulthood… 
And you know the rest.

So I admit that when I hear Jesus’ parable of the “Rich Fool” today it feels little…familiar. We didn’t get *so* many baby supplies that we’re contemplating tearing down our house to build a bigger one to hold it all, But still…it’s a lot of stuff.

There are few stories in the Bible that feel so immediately applicable to us in our time. But it sure feels like this parable is not only “about me but also about you and almost everyone we know.”

As the story goes, there was a man who interrupts Jesus’ teaching to ask a question about family inheritance. He wants Jesus to help divide the inheritance equally between siblings.

But Jesus doesn’t offer a solution to the man’s dilemma. Instead he tells a story of the so-called “The Rich Fool” who had a bumper harvest crop one year. So much so that he decided to tear down his barns and build new ones just to store all his goods.

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1 Thank you to Barbara Brown Taylor for helping me identify this in her sermon on the same parable, *Treasure Hunt*, published in the Review and Expositor, issue 99, in the winter of 2002, page 100.
So here’s my question:
Wasn’t the rich man doing what we’re all encouraged to do?
Save for the future, be prudent with your resources, make your rainy-day fund?
In today’s world we’d probably call him a fiscally conservative, responsible man,
Not a fool.

But that’s exactly what God calls the man at the end of the story – a fool.
Because he took what was understood as a blessing from God – a large harvest –
And made it into some kind of problem to solve.2
And he was “somewhat self-absorbed, as you may have noticed.
He asked himself questions,
answered them himself and then congratulated himself on his good sense.”3

He was a fool because he was so self-centered,
And so focused on his stuff.
But even still, the label of “fool” being spit from the mouth of God stings us a little.

And you know why it stings?
Because, in so many ways, this parable is about us.
Let’s face it:
We live in a culture of barn-builders like the rich fool.
Drive down the streets of our city and suburbs, and you’ll see the landscape dotted with air-
conditioned storage units and warehouses filled with things they know we’ll order soon.
This past week, for the first time in 11 years, the Fed cut interest rates to try and keep our economy boosted.4
They did this to help and avoid another recession…to keep us busy barn-building.
Because we all know that “if the economy is a little sluggish right now, then that’s because some of us aren’t spending enough [money].
If we don’t buy more stuff, then businesses are going to fail, and salaries are going to dry up, and we won’t be able to buy more stuff.
So the worst thing that any of us can do is to cut back on our [spending].
Because our country is counting on us to build more barns.
It’s the American thing to do!”5

We’re a country of barn-builders and this parable is about us.

So here’s what I hear for us today:
I hear Jesus asking us the haunting question:
“When will you have enough?6

When will you have enough money?

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2 Richard Carlson, Feasting on the Word, Year C, page 313.
3 Taylor, Treasure Hunt, 101.
5 Taylor, Treasure Hunt, 99.
And this question seeps not just into our personal lives but also into our churches and our institutions:

- When will *we* have enough?
- When will we’ve saved enough for us and future generations?
- How will we know when we’ve reached that goal?

The Rich Fool claimed that once he was done barn-building he’d sit down to “eat, drink, and be merry!” And so often I’ve heard myself and others make the same claim. But I also know that relaxed contentment so rarely comes.

Because we decide to send our kids to private school (we want what’s best for them),
And then there just isn’t quite enough money anymore.
We save for our retirement, but then we constantly wonder if we saved enough?
The finish line labeled “enough” seems to have a way of moving constantly just a little out of our reach.

Jesus calls this “greed.” It comes from the Greek word pleonexia, which means “the insatiable need for more.”

We all have that within us and within our institutions – the insatiable need for more - And Jesus knows it.

I began this sermon today talking about something I’ve thought about for most of the year – our new baby.
But I want to end by acknowledging the other bookmark of life – our death. Because in fact that’s where Jesus leaves us in the Gospel today.
At the end of this story of riches and barns and inheritance, God says to the rich man: “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

“This very night your life is being demanded of you.”

Putting this is whole dilemma in relation to death has a way of changing things. At the end of our days, the question of “enough” will be a quite different one.

- Did we spend enough time with our families?
- Did we help the poor enough?
- Did we work hard enough to cultivate our faith?

I can’t help but think of these questions in this light, Not only because our Gospel leads us there,
But because as a country of barn-builders, we’re grieving what CNN called “thirteen hours of bloodshed” that happened in the past hours.
More than 20 killed and injured in a mass shooting in an El Paso shopping center.
And another 9 killed and 16 injured just south of us in Dayton overnight.
My heart broke again as I felt the familiar wave of grief go through me when the news flashed across my screens.

“This very night your life is being demanded of you.”

As I’ve processed the news of more shootings in the face of our questions of abundance,
I thought of an African American spiritual many of us may have sung before.
I’ll sing the last verse for you – the one that’s been going through my head.

May these words of our ancestors lead us to a place where Jesus is calling us to go,
Where we finally decide what is enough,
And then do something about it:

Oh, when I come to die
Oh, when I come to die,
Oh, when I come to die,
Give me Jesus.

Give me Jesus,
Give me Jesus,
You can have all this world,
Give me Jesus.

Amen.

7 Give Me Jesus - https://hymnary.org/text/in_the_morning_when_i_rise_in_the_morn