Traveling Light Peace Presbyterian

Luke 12:13-34 Summer Parable Series

Elizabeth M. Deibert 4 August 2019

**Luke 12:13-21 The Poor Rich Farmer**

From the Children’s Bible in 365 Stories

A worried-looking man pushed his way to the front of the crowd to talk to Jesus, *‘Teacher,’* he said, *‘my father has died and my brother won’t divide the family property between us. Please tell him to give me my fair share.’*

*‘It’s not my job to settle arguments like that, my friend,’* Jesus replied. Then he turned to the crowd and said, *‘See that you don’t become greedy. Real life is not a matter of how many things you possess.*

*‘I’ll tell you a story about a rich farmer. One year his belongings were so great that he hadn’t enough room to store it all.*

*‘” I know what I’ll do,” he said to himself. “I’ll pull down this small house and build myself a really big one. Then I can store all my stuff and I’ll have enough to live on for years to come. I shall be able to enjoy myself. I’ll just take it easy and live in comfort.”*

*‘That night God spoke to him.*

*‘” What a fool you have been!” he told him. “This very night you are going to die. What will become of all your stuff and money then? What good will it do you?”*

*‘That’s what happens,’* Jesus ended by saying, *‘to everyone who spends his life getting rich but never gives a thought to being rich in God’s sight.’*

*‘We’ll never be rich!* One of the disciples murmured. Jesus smiled.

*‘Those who haven’t any money sometimes spend as much time thinking about it as rich people do,’* he told them. *‘Don’t keep worrying about where the next meal will come from, or how you will be able to afford new clothes for all the family. Think of the way in which God takes care of birds – and they can’t even earn their own living. God is your heavenly Father. If he provides for the birds, and clothes the flowers so beautifully, he will certainly see that you have the things you need.*

*‘Put God first – always – and he will take care of all your other worries and provide for all your needs.’*

You have heard the scripture, an interpreted version from the Children’s Bible. You have seen the skit which brings this parable into our modern times and invites us to consider how much we clutter our lives with possessions. You have heard the Rich Old Fool lyrics to Old McDonald Had a Farm, written by Joy Kottra and sung by the Olson kids. I love the way this version has the farmer decide to share, instead the alternative of dying while planning for his bigger barns.

One of my pastor-friends has this quote at the bottom of his email, *“Our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding at things in life that don't really matter."* (SLIDE - either DL Moody or Francis Chan) We are very successive in acquiring things. As your insert page today will remind you – we buy too many things. (slide) There are 300,000 items in the average home in the USA, (LA Times) and our homes have tripled in size in the last 50 years. (NPR) One of every 10 of us rents a storage unit. (NYT Mag) We spend more on shoes, jewelry, and watches than on higher education. (Psychology Today) We in the USA buy annually 1.2 trillion dollars worth of non-essential goods – things we do not really need. (Wall Street Journal) Because we have so many things, we will spend a total of 3680 hours or 153 days searching for misplaced items, and in my case, double that figure.

(slide) Let me remind you now again that the scripture begins with someone in the crowd wanting Jesus to be his arbitrator in the legal matter of an inheritance. Oh, the families split apart by concerns about money and inheritance. There were problems in the 1st century and still now in the 21st century. In those days, the eldest was the de facto executor of the will and expected to share the estate with the family. It is a legitimate concern for fairness but Jesus, rather than getting involved in the particulars, takes this opportunity to teach about greed. The scripture ends with the message – put God first in all things and you will have all that you need.

This farmer is the wealthy person who has more than he needs, but rather than giving some away, he thinks of a complicated and expensive way to hold on to his goods, rather than share them. He wants to have so much stored, so much in the bank, so much in the stock market that he never has to worry another day. She wants to eat out every night, and shop daily on Amazon. They want to vacation wherever they want and want to protect their children and grandchildren from any worries about money. Why talk to God about daily needs when you can talk to your own soul. “Soul, you have ample supplies stored up for many years. Relax. You did it. It is yours. After all, you worked hard and then you were wise to save your earnings so well.” But God speaks up and says, “Wait a minute. You have all these things and you are not sharing much? You keep stockpiling your wealth and then tomorrow you die? Why? Why are you not sharing what you have? Why not simplifying your life so you can give more? Why not be rich toward me and toward people I love, the ones who are struggling?”

It is all about traveling light? Not grasping so tight. Whether you are the person who received the inheritance or the person who wants a fair share of the inheritance. Traveling light means being willing to unload some stuff, to share, to live with less. Traveling light means not clinging but sharing, not protecting but giving away. This is the strange world of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Daughter Rebecca is getting ready to move to New York City. As her mother, I am thinking, “How do you get all the stuff you need to NYC, especially without a car? She is generously leaving her car with Emily and Nico, her sister and brother-in-law for a year, maybe two. As a recent college graduate, she is nimbly thinking she can fly with several suitcases initially and manage to live simply, and she probably can travel light. She learned her own lesson about traveling light recently when she came to visit in Montreat during the week our youth were there. Loving the outdoors, she left some things at the house, drove up to Mt. Mitchell, the highest peak east of the Mississippi, and hiked 15 miles down to Montreat. On the next day when she decided it would be fun to hike back up the 15 miles to her car, she had forgotten that this return trip would require her to carry her computer, two pairs of shoes, and a couple of outfits in her backpack. This trip back up the mountain in the rain was not nearly so pleasant going uphill with a pile of possessions on her back.

When our family moved to England with four children 3-11 years old, we had to decide how much we really needed to carry across the ocean. It was difficult but liberating to unload many furnishings, toys, and clothes. We made $14,000 in a single yard sale, because we sold our minivan that day too. Traveling light.

We are not traveling so light these days. It is not just one decision but many decisions that shape our grasping or giving spirit. Children, are you learning to share the candy, the toys, and even the attention of mom or dad? Teens, are you generous with the video game system, with your time in helping your parents and friends? Or do you only do chores for money? Are you resisting the urge to define yourself by what you wear. Adults, do you give regularly and generously at church to propel our mission and ministry? Do you give from the top (your first fruits) or just from the bottom (what’s left after you pay your bills and everything else)? Do you consider the first tenth, the tithe as belonging to God or to you? The critique of Jesus is not about having money. It is about what you do with it. He says, “be on your guard against greed. Life does not consist in abundance of possessions.” His warning is that we should not keep clinging to our possessions without being generous toward God.

I recommend that everyone (no matter your age or income level) simply decide that the first tenth of your income belongs to God and the second tenth goes to savings and then, if you really cannot live on 80%, humbly talk to God about a loan from that 10% that belongs to God, and start paying what you can in a disciplined fashion and spending less in an equally disciplined fashion. I rarely go in stores at all – as a discipline. As I was writing this sermon I was keenly aware of how many times I was tempted by online shopping.

Once you tear down the old barn and build a bigger one, it is a little late. Once you’ve eaten out and shopped too much on the credit card, it is a little late. Once you’ve put yourself first, it is a little hard to put the kin-dom of God first. It is all the decisions along the way that shape whether you can live on the 80% or not. How do you make all those decisions? Remember every step of the way what (slide) Anne Frank said, “No one has ever become poor by giving.” So when Richard and Don’s parents left us an inheritance, we had some choices. Fortunately, there was no argument over the inheritance. First, we all made extra building fund gifts to Peace, significantly larger than we had ever been able to do. What a joy to help build this sanctuary and this ministry, and we are still tithing from monthly income to building and operating. Secondly, we covered college.

Thirdly, the three of us decided to invest in a Montreat house that we could share with others, making it easier for groups like the those from Peace to enjoy conferences there. It is a bigger barn you might say, but it is bigger for the sharing with others and hopefully the sharing of Christian faith too.

We all know that there are no UHaul trailers on hearses and no storage units in the afterlife. We are not taking it with us. It all starts with the daily choices of giving or grasping, trusting God or living in fear, being generous or thinking that we must protect all that we have. Young gunmen who commit mass murders like the one in El Paso are clearly lost in anger and fear. Our role as Christians in this fearful and angry culture is to lead others to true freedom, the freedom of loving Christ and having generous hearts.

Do we really believe what Jesus said? Do we really believe that God will take care of us like the birds of air and the lilies of the field? Do we really trust that we can be generous with others and still have plenty? There is no true greatness without generosity. (slide) Your greatness is not what you have, but what you give.

So let’s get on with traveling light. Let us set out to succeed in generosity, and trust that God will take care of the rest.

Prayer: *God, deliver us from our rich foolishness, rich in things and poor in soul. Help us to build the discipline to unload our burden and travel light, with a courageous and generous sharing spirit. Remind us that You are worthy of our trust, that you are out there in the fields with the lilies and in the trees with the ravens. You are faithfully providing for them as well as for us. Help us to lay down our fears, increase our generosity, and put You first in our lives. Amen.*