

“Rich Toward God and Neighbor”

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Luke 12:13-21

What a fabulous sabbatical! Three months filled with family, friends, reading, rest, reflection and travel. Thank you for this incredible gift of renewal. One aspect of renewal for me was taking a long, *solo* motorcycle trip...I've taken long motorcycle trips before but never alone. So the sabbatical provided me an opportunity to check that solo ride off my bucket list and I rode 2,310 miles on my trusty 1981 Honda Silverwing. Through Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa, I cruised through some of the most beautiful and fruitful farmland our country has to offer. I took in the aroma of Mother Earth's perfume as I drove alongside freshly mowed alfalfa fields, I gazed upon the beauty of Lake of the Ozarks, watched combine crews gather in the bounty of Kansas' wheat fields, and, once again, was thrilled by the site of Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, Nebraska. What a blessing to put my knees to the wind for 2,310 miles.

As I dove through this fertile land of ours I saw some of the most picturesque farmsteads one will ever see. *What state, in your opinion, has the most beautiful farmsteads?* My opinion votes for the state of ***Iowa*** with those scenic farmsteads nestled in rolling hills, surrounded by acres of lush green corn, with the two story white houses and big red barns taking center-stage. I have always loved those big red barns of Iowa and have viewed them as symbols of middle-American values and agricultural prosperity. Although it wouldn't have been the Iowa type barns, Jesus refers to barns in one of his most important parables. This is a message we all need to hear.

Read ***Luke 12:13-21***

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” ¹⁴But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” ¹⁶Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ ¹⁸Then 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. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

Here we see a brother....most likely the younger brother... requesting that Jesus get involved in settling a family inheritance dispute. But Jesus would not get involved as arbitrator or judge. Then, it’s almost as if Jesus thought to himself, *“Since so many get hooked by this subject I’m going to run with it as a teachable moment.”* So Jesus said, ***“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed!”***

When we think of greed we often think in terms of money and possessions....and we’ll get to that. However, John Calvin warned that the human heart can make an idol out of anything and Jesus warns us to guard against all kinds of greed. *What do you want so badly that you would do almost anything to get?* Be on guard: greed for position....fame.....an award....a degree.....reputation as the brightest, strongest, most caring....you name it and we can be greedy toward it.

But here’s the kicker....because we are made in the image of God we have a spirit to grow, explore and be excellent. There is nothing wrong with striving for position, fame, awards, degrees, reputation and success but when that striving fills our lives and becomes the reason for our existence we have crossed the edge into the quicksand of greed. So Jesus says, ***“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed!”***

Then Jesus really begins to meddle when he reminds us, “ ***for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.***” *How many of us would not admit that we have an “abundance of possessions?”* We all have a lot of stuff. Our homes are filled with stuff and when there’s no more room for our stuff the common next step is to rent out a storage facility. *How many of us have not bought into the belief that life is found in our portfolios, property and possessions?* One of the positives of the recent recession is that people are seeking to live more simply and eco friendly. We are coming to our senses that we don’t need all of this stuff. We are relearning that there is more to life than things.

Jesus presses the issue by telling a parable commonly called “*the parable of the rich fool.*” The rich man was a successful businessman. He was not deceitful, he did not mistreat his employees, he did not steal from his neighbors...the rich man was just successful! He used the most environmentally friendly fertilizer, he planted the right kind of seed, the rains came at the right time and the sun warmly blanketed the soil and the harvest made the man very wealthy. But God called the man a “*fool.*” *Why?* He didn’t lie, cheat or steal. But God called him a “*fool.*” *Why?*

It’s right there in the text. This man’s fatal mistake was arrogance. Anytime we believe the possessions and people of our life *belong* to us and are ours solely for *our* good pleasure, we are skating on the thin ice of arrogance and greed.

“What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops? 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.’” He did not seek counsel with God or others nor did he thank God or others for his good fortune. It was all about him.

Greed motivated the foolish man to build bigger barns. But bigger barns are not the problem. Again, as we are made in God’s image, there is something within us that yearns to create and build. Bigger barns can be a very good thing. The farmer’s entrepreneur spirit was not the reason God called him a fool.

He had a cancer of the soul and it is called greed! It evidently never entered the farmer’s mind to share his abundance with others. It evidently never entered his mind that his abundance carried with it opportunity and responsibility to help others. The greatest good he could imagine was maximizing his own pleasure. There was no thought for God or anyone but himself! And God called him a “fool” and Jesus concluded the parable by stating, ***“So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”***

*Are there people in your lives that serve as models of being rich toward God? Granted everyone struggles with “**all kinds of greed**” and no one is perfectly greedless. But surely there are people who have inspired us to be rich toward God and neighbor. Many of you have inspired and encouraged me to be rich toward God and neighbor. *Who do you look to as examples of those who are “rich toward God and neighbor?”**

One of my goals for the sabbatical was to return to my roots and reflect on the positives of my heritage. I knew that would mean returning to my home church and gazing upon the picture of my father for whom the Fellowship Hall of Forest Park Presbyterian Church was named. (Forest Park has now merged with Northminster Pres and the two are now New Covenant Pres Church) I don't think I have told you much about my Dad other than he died at the age of 49, so today I want to share a bit more about this man who continues to be a model of one who was rich toward God and neighbor.

I had never thought, until about a year ago, that when I mention the Fellowship Hall was named after my father that some might think it was because he donated a lot of money to the church. That's not how the Fellowship Hall became named "*Wade Hall*." My Dad gave generously to the church but he never had much to give. My Dad grew up in the Great Depression on a farm in southwest Missouri, the youngest of six siblings. He was a hard worker and understood that, even though he was the youngest, he would also be expected to work the farm and help financially support the family. WWII came along and he enlisted in the army and was on a troop ship headed for Japan when the war ended. He came home married my Mom, rented a small house in Hutchinson, Kansas and started having children. Four Wade children were born and my Dad would often work up to three jobs to make ends meet. (The Post Office, a Roofing Company, and Custodian of our grade school) Neither he nor my Mother ever went to college but somehow it was never a question that the four Wade children would attend college. While my parents were unable to financially pay for our college they were rich toward us with encouragement and a vision to receive an education they never had. So my three sisters all became teachers and I'm a preacher. My Dad was rich toward God and family as he sacrificed greatly that we might have a better life.

My Dad was the go-to guy in the neighborhood. Mrs. Moore, an 80 year old widow who lived across the street, would regularly call Dad, "*Harold, can you come over and fix my plumbing problem, my leaky roof, or my car won't start.*" It didn't matter what the problem or what time of day or night, my Dad was committed to helping Mrs. Moore. He never expected anything in return...he counted it a privilege to help a neighbor. Dad seemed to always be helping neighbors with one project or another. He was rich toward God and our neighbors as he offered his fixit skills to make life a little easier for those who needed the help.

Dad was also President of the School Board, even at the same time he was custodian of the school. He attended many meetings and dealt with tricky management issues and was always referred to as an honest and fair leader. He was rich toward God and North Reno Grade School.

At Forest Park Presbyterian Church he was an Elder, an Adult Sunday School teacher, choir member, and generally recognized as a wisdom figure. It was through his leadership that the decision was made to move from 6th avenue to the new building which you can see in your bulletin. Dad was soft spoken and, actually, rather quiet. He would not fill a room with his personality like some do but when he spoke people listened. They trusted him because it was known that he would be putting forth the best interest of the church in whatever he said. Dad sincerely believed what was inscribed on the plaque in Wade Hall and people affirmed it. This is vintage Dad.... "***His daily devotion to living God's witness and Christian leadership was an inspiration to many. He often said, 'The Church is not a rest home for saints, but a hospital for sinners.'***"

It was renewing to me to stand, with my sister, Anne, beside the picture of Dad and be reminded that it was because he was rich toward God and neighbor that he was honored by having the Fellowship Hall named after him. Dad was not perfect but he certainly left an inspiring legacy of love.

As I thought about coming back to Fairmont I was pleased to be returning on a communion Sunday. Because in this sacrament we have the ultimate reminder of One who was rich toward God and neighbor. I think this is a wonderful way to begin the next chapter of life together...celebrating the love and grace of Jesus Christ who gave his life that we might live and know what it means to be rich toward God and neighbor. I look forward to following in his footsteps with you on the journey of being rich toward God and neighbor.

Amen



**Forest Park Presbyterian Church
Hutchinson, KS
(Now New Covenant Presbyterian Church)**



Bob and his sister Anne Woolsey