

The Parable of the Rich Fool

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’” Then he said, “This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?”

“Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus says; Do not worry; Sell your possessions and give to the poor.

The parable of the riot mother.

“Cause everybody in the hood has had it up to here.
It's getting harder and harder and harder each and every year.
Some kids went in a store with their mother;

I saw her when she came out, she was gettin' some Pampers”

These lyrics, which I have named The Parable of the Riot Mother, come from a song titled April 29th, 1992 by Sublime. I encourage you all to go home and listen to it after we leave this space today. April 26th, 1992 there were nationwide riots, including in Eugene, Oregon. The spark? Rodney King was beaten by four Los Angeles police officers - and they were acquitted of all charges. How quickly we all forget. How slow we are to change.

This is not the first time we have heard these words as we work our way through our devotional for Lent this year. It's easy to forget how many times Jesus speaks these words as we move through life and find ourselves making our shopping lists, considering what we will put into Easter baskets and Easter eggs, and keeping a mental list of whose birthday is coming up and what must be purchased for them.

I'm not going to stand up here and tell any of you that those things don't matter. Of course we stop at the grocery store to purchase food to sustain our bodies. The joy on kid's faces when they receive Easter baskets is contagious for grown-ups of all ages. And our loved ones appreciate our kind gestures and gifts when remembering a milestone such as a birthday. Those things all matter.

I will stand up here and ask you to consider those who do not have the capacity to purchase groceries at the grocery store, or gather items for Easter baskets, or gift items for birthdays or other special occasions. What extra do we, as Gethsemane, have for our neighbors who go without?

If you are on social media in any capacity maybe you have seen something that says “if you see someone stealing food, no you didn't.” Sometimes that sentence swaps food for diapers. Sometimes that sentence swaps diapers for gas.

Let's listen to The Parable of the Riot Mother once more;
“Cause everybody in the hood has had it up to here.
It's getting harder and harder and harder each and every year.
Some kids went in a store with their mother;
I saw her when she came out, she was gettin' some Pampers”

Our devotional this week includes a story about owners of a vineyard. Much like the rich man in Jesus' parable, this couple owns producing land and has an abundance of goods. The produced goods are as different as each person's approach to the abundance. The rich man in our parable receives more than he can store, or use, and decides he must build a larger space to store his goods in for himself - to retire and eat and drink. The couple with the vineyard finds an abundance of beauty and space and decides those goods are for everyone, to be shared freely.

God rebukes the rich man for deciding to build a bigger barn to store up his items. God asks “you will die tonight - then who will get your things?”

As we all age, it's natural (and helpful for our descendants) to consider this exact same question. When we move on to the next life; who will get our things? Not only who will get our things, but do those people *need* those things?

74% of people who fall into the wealth class titled "ultra-wealthy" are there because they inherited large sums of assets. These people inherited monies, stocks, houses, and other 'goods' which has allowed them to maintain storing up their treasures here on earth. Household names like Elon Musk, Bill Gates, and Kylie Jenner. 38% of people who have received inheritances valued over \$10,000 identify as white; compared to just 16% and 13% of people who identify as Latino and Black. These are people born into families with more than 'enough', and go on to live successfully with the ability to build bigger barns and store up more treasure.

But, who are we storing these treasures up for? Who benefits from the storage of assets?

We all see the failings of our society at-large as we make our way through this life. We are able to see tents, abandoned shopping carts, and people holding make-shift signs even as we make our way into this church building from the comfort of our homes. And I wonder, again, what does Gethsemane have an abundance of? What might we have stored up in barns too big for us that we could, and should, share freely with our neighbors?

Is that our space? For sleeping, or washing bodies and clothes, or eating? For community members to use - for free - in times of distress and joy?

Is it our goods? How many pounds of construction paper can we really go through in a year? How many quilts on our pews is enough? Too many?

Is it a question of stewarding our money differently? How much money should we have on hand, in savings, or tied up in restricted funds?

Even as we explore ways to give freely with our excess, we are guarded. We check out an organization's credentials and ensure they are 'reputable' enough. We listen for recommendations from friends and family for "good" places to give to. We hesitate to give cash to those standing outside with their make-shift signs and worry they will use that money for drinks or drugs.

If we listen to Jesus' words; don't worry - give to the poor, there are no disclaimers attached. Jesus doesn't say "don't give to the poor who might buy a beer", or "don't give to the poor who already received a meal today", and Jesus doesn't say "but be sure to avoid the organization without lots of reviews and a network of community partners".

"Some kids went in a store with their mother;
I saw her when she came out, she was gettin' some Pampers"

How many people saw the riot mom and thought - "she's just another rioter", or "what kind of mom would have her kids out in this", or "she's just a looter"?

Jesus simply tells us not to worry - that God will care for us better than the birds who have enough, better than the wildflowers with extravagant clothes, and tells us to prepare our purses for our real treasure; in heaven.

We will not find true treasures here on this earth by saving enough money or owning enough assets. We do not find real treasure by eating extravagant meals or enjoying expensive libations. We are told over and over again that our mission and our call on this earth is to store up treasures of kindness, love, compassion and good works for our neighbors. Neighbors who have no worldly treasure to speak of. Neighbors who struggle with mental health, addiction, and housing stability. Neighbors impacted by institutional racism and violence. Neighbors who need our good works, grace, and excess goods more than a bigger barn and the next generation ever will. Without caring for our neighbor like riot mom going into a store during large scale rioting and looting, with her children, for a package of pampers - if we cannot stand in her shoes - if we cannot find her and **her** neighbors worthy of our excess - where do our hearts, our treasures, lie?

Don't worry, Jesus says. Sell your possessions and give to the poor.

Amen.