



THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

AUGUST 4, 2019

LUKE 12: 13-21

**“THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A BABY”**

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.”

- THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A BABY.
- SO SAYS ONE OF OUR MOST THOUGHTFUL PSYCHOTHERAPISTS.
- THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A BABY.
- WHY?
- BECAUSE THERE IS ONLY A BABY AND A MOTHER.

- As infants, we all come into this world hungrily searching for relationship. We long for the gaze of our mother, we root for her breast, we want to snuggle into her arms.
- At last Sunday's baptism, little Scarlett Ophelia was visibly dismayed when her mother handed her to me. Scarlett's eyes locked onto her mother as if to say, "What the heck did you just do?"
- What sets Jesus apart from other spiritual teachers is his highly relational view of the world and God.
- God is Abba, *daddy*, not just some distant sky deity.
- Forgiveness is not something we do alone in our heads. Jesus brings it down into the space between two people.
- What did I do to you? How did I harm you? What needs to be forgiven? Can you forgive me? How do I change so this doesn't happen again?
- Jesus doesn't wander the earth alone, some ascetic teacher removed from the common folks.
- Instead, he calls twelve friends together. That then grows to seventy. He breaks religious and cultural rules that create barriers to relationship by including women, outcasts, religious pariahs, the poor, and sick.
- In the mind of Jesus, there is no such thing as an isolated Christian. There is only a faith community.
- Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them, says Jesus.

- Today, we have people who graciously choose to become linked to our faith community.
- We didn't choose them. We didn't do background checks. I didn't grill them on their religious beliefs. The Congregational Council didn't make them recite Luther's Small Catechism, as if any of the rest of us could.
- They chose us.
- How cool is that?
- But when it comes to relationship, what are we to make of this guy with so many possessions that he is contemplating tearing down his barn so he has even more room to hold everything he has?
- The man is already rich. Then his land produces a bumper crop.
- He did not work hard to produce this abundance. It is a gift of the land and a gift from God.
- Now, the Greek text states that "he dialogued with himself" about what to do.
- You see? The parable is telling us that he has withdrawn from relationship: he only has himself to talk to....
- In some ways, Pittsburgh is like the Middle East. That is, we have to talk about everything among ourselves.
- Everybody's business is everybody else's business. In the Middle East, decisions are made about even trivial things after hours of discussion with family and friends.

- I remember when I first came to CLC, any number of people made the comment that people at CLC talk and talk about every issue and then nothing happens.
- Renovating the Social Hall had been discussed countless times which is good. That's relational. But nothing ever moved forward.
- That's why I get paid the big bucks to come in and say, "Then why don't we do it?"
- This guy, though, lives in isolation from the human community and when it comes to an important decision he can only talk with himself.
- What seems to be true is that whether you live in the Middle East, Europe, South America, the Far East, or the United States the more wealth people acquire, the farther they withdraw from their neighbors.
- The prophet Isaiah writes:
  - Woe to those who join house to house,
  - Who add field to field,
  - Until there is no more room,
  - And you are made to dwell alone
  - In the midst of the land.
- This is our man, left mumbling to himself amidst the wealth of his land.
- He asks himself, "what shall I do?"
- He displays no awareness that his bumper crop, which he did not work to create, is a gift from God. No, the abundance is his and his alone.
- Augustine, one of the early church fathers, writes: "He did not realize that the bellies of the poor were much safer storerooms than his barns."

- The rich man holds a different perspective. The climax in the middle of the parable describes his decision to pull down his barns and build bigger barns for his bountiful harvest.
- And he said, “I will do this: I will pull down **my** barns and build larger ones; and I will store all **my** grain and **my** goods.”
- There is no mention of employees, who have done and will do all the work. Rather, he knows only **my** crop, **my** grain, **my** goods and **my** soul. At the end of this narcissistic tweet, he thinks, “I will say to my self, ‘Self, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.’”
- Jesus is a sly guy. He has the rich man referencing the Book of Ecclesiastes, “and I commend enjoyment, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat, drink, and enjoy himself.”
- But Jesus’ first listeners would have been aware of the final sentence in this passage, “for this will go with him in his toil through the days of life **which God gives him under the sun.**”
- Oh. There is no such thing as a baby.
- There is only a baby and a mother.
- There is no such thing as a baby and a mother.
- There is only a baby, a mother, and a God who gives them both a limited number of days under the sun.
- I love the Roman Catholic teaching that when an egg is fertilized by the sperm, God joins a soul to that union.
- From the very beginning, relationship. Egg and sperm, God and soul....
- Unless we lose our way and allow our wealth to propel us into isolation.
- Did you ever wonder whether every person whose path you cross is an opportunity for you momentarily to be in relationship?

- The broken-down woman holding her cardboard sign at the stop sign at the Pitt tunnel.
- Someone in your neighborhood whom you can see is struggling.
- The woman who sits by herself at our Neighborhood Table.
- I think I have finally come to see that we believers are meant to be conduits for whatever goodness God has given us so that it flows through us to other people whose needs are greater than ours.
- One human community in relationship.
- It is not a matter of working at it. Working to be in relationship.
- No, Jesus comes telling us that we are already in relationship with one another with God as father. It's not a matter of our doing something. It's a matter of clearing away all of the mistaken notions in our isolated heads that say, "this is mine".
- My church, my wealth, my car, my house, my soul....
- The house Deb and I inhabit on Perry Highway has a lovely archway on the south side.
- After we purchased the house, we discovered that this particular architectural archway is an Old Lutheran construct, most often found in the upper Midwest meant to indicate that travelers will find a welcome place to rest.
- Which makes it not just our house, does it? And what a lovely Lutheran tradition.

- On the other hand, did you know that billionaires throughout the world are constructing bunkers to withstand a nuclear holocaust, mass starvation, or a zombie apocalypse.
- These bigger barns, if you will, contain entire golf courses, swimming pools, gyms, and luxurious surroundings.
- These wealthy people have withdrawn from the rest of the world. Their wealth, their barns, their survival.
- What they are shouting loud and clear is “What I have in mine and mine alone. I owe no one anything. I do not engage the world unless it furthers my wealth. I do not invest in the world and our collective future.”
- And these are the people the larger culture has trained us to admire and mimic: athletes who succeed because their physical prowess is actually a gift from God.
- The wealthy who most often have inherited their wealth from their families, almost always built on the backs of the lower classes. Celebrities who have some gift from God in an area of the arts.
- And who, almost to a person, withdraw from the rest of us the more money and fame they acquire.
- When I lived in Los Angeles as a struggling musician, I was told in a thousand subtle ways that I was nothing because I wasn’t driving a Mercedes, living in one of the tonier parts of the city, and wasn’t hanging with the beautiful people.
- I had my revenge, though, while playing at the Playboy Club. The sound and lighting manager and I would put whoopie cushions under the sofa cushions in the bar lounge so that when some rich young guy sat down with his hot date he got quite a surprise.

- We would watch it go down and then convulse in laughter until we had tears in our eyes....
- Wealth is seductive. It creates the illusion of security and comfort. The fantasy that we can safeguard ourselves from the rest of the world.
- But we are created for relationship.
- There is no such thing as a baby.
- Only a baby and a mother.
- Only a baby and a mother and a father God and a human community of brothers and sisters.
- I think what we discovered together at our first carnival was what we can do for others in human community.
- What we did was to give our time, our money, our energy, our love, our very selves so that children and families and adults could come here and experience a good time at a price they could afford.
- From the start, we were not out to make money. Instead, how could we offer Millvale an affordable opportunity to forget the weight of the world and just have a good time?
- We made a difference.
- Each of you makes a difference.
- It is a world for fighting for, a world worth living for, a world worth working for, a world worth suffering for.
- SERMON SONG: **TWO** BY RYAN ADAMS