



“Build Smart”

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
8:30 and 10:45 a.m., Sunday, July 31, 2016
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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Here's the setup from our gospel reading: Jesus is preaching; we don't know where (this whole message appears to begin at the beginning of chapter 11). There is a large crowd, that has continued to grow the longer he is talking.

Thus far he has: cast out demons; warned of the signs of Jonah; denounced Pharisees and lawyers; warned against hypocrisy; and encouraged the hearers not to fear those who can only kill the body.

Out of this cacophony of a crowd comes some guy with a question - well, actually, more like a statement, or even a demand:

"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

We know **nothing** about this questioner nor his circumstances. This brother may have valid complaints: perhaps his brother **is** honestly short-changing him. All children - at least, all male children - were entitled to *something*.

What this fellow is asking *may* well be against Jewish law, where the first born receives the bulk of the inheritance. Deuteronomy 21:17 states that the eldest son receives a *double portion* of the inheritance, and then what ever is left is then divided up.

This fellow, this slighted brother, appears to be wanting more than his allotted share. With his question/demand to Jesus, it rather sounds like the brother might want all the way up to an **equal** amount. Which would be unheard of. Maybe he's anticipating the story of the Prodigal son, that Jesus will use in just a few more chapters. We don't know.

All this unknown **may** allow us to be able to sympathize with the questioner. However, Jesus responds in pure rabbinical form, answering a question with a question:

Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you? (v14).

To which he then adds:

Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. (v15)

Jesus gives this warning against greed, against the love of things, against *affluenza*, even.

Then, he gets into this parable, which is really rather cool. Notice how it begins:

The land of a rich man produced abundantly. (v16)

It is the LAND, or it could be read, *The Creator*, who is providing the abundance, NOT the man himself. I think we all tend to overlook that brief opener, that's really a dope slap to us all as to where our **own** abundance truly comes from - our own hard work? No. It comes from God's grace. The abundant crop is a gift, yet the rich man does not acknowledge it as such.

More so, the rich man refers to them as "**my** crops," "**my** grain and **my** goods." He appears to go opposite of Boaz & Ruth, do you remember that story, from the Old Testament? Ruth & her mother-in-law Naomi return to Naomi's home town. In order to survive, Ruth goes to a field owned by Boaz that is being harvested, and, as dictated by law, she is allowed to pick up the grain that has either fallen on the ground or been passed over by the harvester. This law is to allow widows, orphans, and any who were unable to work, to be able to have some food.

The rich man, in contrast, seemingly has his people scoop up every last kernel of grain for his own use. And rather than donate the overflow from his current storage capacities, or even choosing to economically simply build additional storage units, he goes and chooses to *demolish* his current structures in order to build bigger ones. It might seem like the smart thing to do.

It could possibly be that with this harvest the rich man feels he has hit the lottery, that he's now got his retirement in hand, and can finally relax. I find it interesting that he is not *specifically* condemned by God for keeping the excess, nor for the tearing down and rebuilding of his barns. He is not *necessarily* a picture of unending greed. It seems, rather, that he is condemned when he talks to his *Soul*, he ends up being self-judged:

And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." (v19)

In response to his. . .narcissism (?) the Lord God demands the rich man's life.

What I really notice, though, is that last sentence that our lesson ends with:

So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God. (v21)

Did you catch what this is saying here? Do you comprehend what this is implying? Jesus is *not* saying that material wealth is bad. He is *not* saying that possessions, or things, automatically put us on God's hit list (God doesn't **have** a hit list). What was it that this rich man *did*? It's not that he was successful. It's not that he was wealthy. It's not even that he wanted to party (that whole "eat, drink and be merry" bit, that's something we are all encouraged to do, celebrate and enjoy this creation that God has given us). The problem arose because this rich man does *not* take God into account with his actions:

*'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.'*

*I will do this. These are **my** things.*

Okay, so here's what I'm **not** saying: having things isn't bad. It's all right to go ahead and improve your house; drive a nice car; go to a movie; use a smart phone; have internet; eat, even. Realize, however, that *if* we claim to have God in our lives, *then* we are called to *give back* to God.

I understand, though, that with the amount of personal debt I have, I'm not the best example to be standing up to attempt to talk finances. I'm not quite able to tithe. We were close, and then last year we got hit with a bunch of medical expenses. And of course, there are always things around the house that need to get done, or repaired, or replaced, let alone the things we would *like* to do.

This lesson, though, is about *more* than simply *money*; it concerns **all** our wealth: our time, talent, and treasure.

Still, this guy, this rich man, was looking to store up for **himself** here on earth. Jesus says, store up those treasures, whatever those treasures may be, in heaven. Those treasures of generosity; kindheartedness; helping those in need; listening to someone who needs to talk; giving out of your own abundance; making time to volunteer, even if it's for something you might rather not do; as well as to financial support causes & organizations.

Give to God, as God first gave to us. It's an easy thing to say, but it's not always all that easy to do. Still, it's the **right** thing to do. Not for fear of our lives. Not because we think we'll earn ourselves some God points. But because it's the right thing, it's the smart thing, to do.

Build up those treasures with God. Build smart.

Amen.

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