As I was driving back to NH from my mother’s house in CT on Friday I passed a billboard that depicted a pastoral scene. A huge red barn was nestled in the midst farmland and livestock was grazing nearby. The billboard asked a question, “What could you do with a brand-new barn?” If I ever had wondered just where the focus of this sermon would be, that pretty well decided it for me.

This passage and the parable that goes with it is commonly referred to as the “*Foolish Rich Man”*, but I like the way another writer calls it simply, *“The Barn Guy”*. Jesus tells this story of the man with the abundant harvest in order to explain the warning he gives to a man seeking arbitration between a two brothers in dispute over their father’s estate.

*“Take care!”,* he says*, “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”*

And then the parable. *“The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ Then 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. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’*

So what’s the problem? Neither man is essentially wrong in what they are asking or doing. The man coming to Jesus to ask for arbitration has a point. In the Jewish tradition of the time, the eldest male was to inherit 2/3 of the father’s estate, and the younger, 1/3. Not particularly equitable, but, under the law, fair. And so, if that 1/3 portion is not forthcoming, arbitration may be necessary to resolve the issue. Makes sense.

And what of the man with the abundance of harvest? He does not appear to be terrible, bad person. There is no here evidence that he has acquired the land through illegal maneuvering or taken land from the poor to make a fortune. He has not exploited his workers or cheated others for his own gain. He simply has more grain than he has storage space, and he is seeking to preserve the grain for future use. It seems perfectly logical, doesn’t it?

In the case of either man, one seeking justice, and the other wanting to create storage for an overflow of harvest, these are in themselves evidence of greediness. Let’s listen again.

*“Take care!”,* he says*, “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”*

In the parable, Jesus lets the landowner speak for himself. *And* ***he thought to himself****, ‘What should* ***I*** *do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ Then 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.*

It’s quite a monologue the man has going…………What should I do? I will do this. I will do that. I will tear down. I will build.

I-I-me-me-my-my, aye, aye, aye!

It reminds me of ***“I Me Me Mine”***, a song that The Beatles released shortly before they split as a group. Written by George Harrison, he describes it as an expression of his seeking to understand what he called “the ego problem”, a battle between self-absorption and seeking a greater purpose in the world.

The only person the rich man talks to is himself. It doesn’t even occur to him to seek another’s counsel. His world is small, insulated to his own thoughts. He appears to have no connection to community, no memory of God who commanded that grain be left on the edges of the field for travelers and the poor. He does not build barns as Joseph did for Pharaoh, to prepare for a time of famine, an act in the interest of the greater good. All of the bounty is the landowner’s to worry about and preserve. His grain, his harvest, his land, his barns. He can’t conceive of the needs of those beyond his own. No neighbor to consider and care for. No need for God in his life.

And the man believes he will be set for life. No worries.

*But 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?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”*

God didn’t call the man a fool because he was productive or preparing for days ahead. His foolishness is the product of his distorted, insular, inward only way of looking at the world and his place in it. His problem was not *too much grain* in his *too small silos*, but that he was spiritually starving to death in the midst the abundance.

I, me, mine. This is the kind of insidious greed that Jesus warns against. It is a kind of narcissism that appears to be prevalent in our world right now that tells us we and only we are the ones that can secure our future. Or perhaps worse, a gospel based in prosperity as evidence of God’s favor toward us. Yesterday’s message from SSJE, *Brother Give Us A Word* daily message was from Br. Keith Nelson. He wrote, “*The world’s standards of what is wise are usually at odds with the wisdom that will align us most squarely with the kingdom of heaven.”*

The book of Proverbs tells us, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways, acknowledge God, and God will make straight your paths.”* (Prov 3:5-6)

Earlier this week as I was driving around, I set my radio to “scan”. It’s the setting that automatically moves the tuner along, stopping at stations with good signal and gives a 10 second sample of what’s playing. It’s good to use since it keeps my hands on the wheel and my eyes on the road. At one point, it landed on a Christian broadcasting station. I have to confess that generally, that’s not my cup of tea, but the words in the song that was playing at that moment caught my ear. “*Live like you are loved. Stand like you are free.”*

Essentially this is Paul’s message to the Colossians today. Whatever you do in word or deed, do it in the name of Christ. “Christ is all and in all.” Both Paul and Jesus’ point us to our place in community, how we live together and how we act and interact with each other.

Perhaps there are places in our lives where we are feeling some relative comfort and where our needs are being met. And that’s a very good thing. Jesus challenges us not necessarily to build bigger and better barns to hold our treasure, but to stand in the knowledge that we are free in Christ and living as those who are loved, sharing freely of that abundance in community.

Clothed in Christ, we walk in his love, and our lives are being transformed in him. This calls for a response on our part, a change in our way of being. The old ways are falling away and we are being renewed.

Where are our riches showing up? Is it in our individual and collective voices that we might challenge institutional structures and policies that penalize and stigmatize those in need of assistance? Is it in found persistent and shameless prayer in the public square for justice and peace? Or perhaps in the continual examination of our internal and external lives in the presence and service of God?

As Barbara Brown Taylor expresses it in her own exploration of this parable:

*“My guess is that every person here has a different purpose, a different way of being rich toward God……*

*The important thing is to sense how your life and God’s life are flowing in the same direction—and if you are clear that they are not, then to do something about it. Get yourself a purpose as soon as you can—one that helps God mend the world….. and mends you while you are at it.*

*Until then, if you have to be greedy, then be greedy for love. Be greedy for justice, and wisdom, and significance. That way, when it comes time to show God what is in your treasure chest, there won’t be any doubt in either of your minds that you are rich, rich, rich.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Amen*

1. Taylor, Barbara Brown. “Treasure Hunt: Luke 12:13-21.” *Review & Expositor* 99.1 (2002): 97-104. *ATLASerials, Religion Collection*. Web. 31 July 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)