

“Did the Middle of My Sentence Interrupt the Beginning of Yours?” (Luke 12:13-21)

Most of us learn “the-value-of-money” very early in life.

Once upon a time, a four-year-old girl was the flower girl at her aunt’s wedding.

Eventually, the minister got-to-the-part-of-the-service where he asked the bride if she would take the groom for richer or for poorer.

And that’s when that four-year-old flower girl whispered loudly to the bride: *“Take richer, take richer!”*

Given the choice, most of us would take richer...in the scripture passage Merlin read to us this morning, Jesus addresses the appetite we all have FOR MORE.

Our scripture passage begins with two brothers squabbling over an inheritance.

“Teacher,” one of the two men said to Jesus, *“tell my brother to divide the family inheritance.”*

How do you like that? He didn’t come to Jesus for guidance or mediation – he didn’t want Jesus’ opinion...he just wanted Jesus to tell his brother to do what HE wanted him to do.

Let’s look in the mirror. What is our focus when we go to God? Do we go to God for guidance, for wisdom...for instruction? What I’m asking is – when we pray – do we LISTEN to God

OR do we simply TELL GOD what we want & when we want it (*NOW!*)?

Back to our passage...Jesus refused the man’s request. *“Who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”* he asked the man. Jesus would not judge BETWEEN them,

but – through a parable or a story – you might say that he becomes a judge OVER them.

Jesus begins by saying, “The land of a rich man produced abundantly.”

According to Jesus, WHO produced the abundant crop – the rich man or the land?

Today’s farmers are amazing! They can plant more in a day than farmers 75 years ago could plant in two weeks! Weeds are few in today’s fields & rows are as straight as a ruler. BUT what could our farmers do without the land – the soil – that God has given them?

The land produced such a bumper crop that the rich man “*made-up-his-mind*” to pull down his barns and build bigger ones & then he would relax...eat...drink...and be merry. But God intervened, saying: “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”

The word “FOOL” is not a word that is used lightly in Scripture – it’s used only twice in the Gospel of Luke but nearly 70 times in the Book of Proverbs. Generally speaking, the word “FOOL” (when used in the Bible) refers to those who live their lives as if God does not exist.

There are 4 different words for “FOOL” in the ancient Greek language (the language in which the New Testament was first written). The one used in our scripture passage is “*aphron*” – the harshest of the four words for “FOOL” in the Bible.

Do you remember what Forrest Gump’s MAMA used to say? “Stupid is as stupid does.”

That’s the kind of foolishness that’s being talked about here – he wasn’t a thief & there’s no mention that he mistreated his workers.

WHAT MADE HIM SO FOOLISH?

- 1) In planning for himself, he forgot his neighbors.
- 2) In considering his goods, he forgot the Giver.
- 3) In providing for his body, he forgot his soul.

Every day, Brethren, we are given opportunities to be faithful. We can choose to live for God OR we can choose to live for ourselves. We can choose to be selfless OR we can choose to be selfish.

When the rich fool asked himself, “*What should I do?*” he was at just such a crossroads.

You see, he had some options. He could’ve thanked God that his barns were full and simply given away the rest of his crops to the poor & needy of his community.

Or if he didn’t want “*to-just-give-away*” his surplus, he could’ve loaned it to area farmers who had suffered a poor crop, with the understanding that they would help him in the future when he had a poor crop.

Unfortunately, instead of looking out the WINDOW he looked in the MIRROR!

Listen again to what he said to himself in verse 18: “*This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns & build bigger ones & there I will store all my grain & my goods.*”

The rich man from this parable uses the words “I” and “MY” 11 times in his 3 sentences.

The great 20th-Century Preacher – Fred Craddock – commented that this man “*lives for himself, talks to himself, plans for himself, congratulates himself.*” His focus-on-self reminds me of something a disc golf friend of mine was fond of saying: “*I’m sorry. Did the middle of my sentence interrupt the beginning of yours?*”

Who did the rich man have a conversation with? HIMSELF!

In that time & place, DECISIONS – especially big ones – were made communally

and after long conversations with family & friends. But in Jesus' story the man is totally alone, mumbling to himself. His is the only voice to which he listens. It's a fool's monologue.

It is – if you will pardon the pun – an “*I-dolatrous*” conversation.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that “*selfishness has no place*” in the Kingdom of God:

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself & became obedient to death – even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:5-8)

I think the Christian blogger, Mark Merrill, got it right when he said:

“Selfishness destroys relationships. Humility develops relationships.”

Another BIG MISTAKE the rich fool made can be found in verse 18:

*“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down **MY** barns & build bigger ones & there*

*I will store all **MY** grain & **MY** goods.’”*

You can learn a lot about a person by the language they use.

This man didn't say, *“I will tear down the barns God has given me & build bigger ones*

and there I will store all of the grain & goods God has blessed me with.”

But that's not what he said & that was his SECOND BIG MISTAKE – in considering his goods,

he forgot the Giver!

The Apostle Paul asks the followers of Jesus an excellent rhetorical question in 1st Corinthians,

chapter 4, verse 7: “*What do you have that you did not receive?*”

I asked John Wolfe (when I met with him & Margaret & his sister, Markita,

after Marge Wolfe’s passing): “*If Marge could have me say one thing during the service,*

what might she have me say?”

After giving it a bit of thought, John said: “*Think of others.*”

What a faithful response! Another faithful response is this: “*Give thanks.*”

Those two words – just ten letters (“*Give thanks!*”) can be found 36 times in the Psalms alone!

Our first thought shouldn’t be to pat ourselves on the back...our first thought should be to give

thanks to God, the Giver of all good things! Friends, don’t make the same mistake as the rich fool.

Don’t forget the Giver!

A third mistake that rich fool made can be found in verse 19 where he says to himself:

“*You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Relax...eat...drink...and be merry.*”

It seems to me that the rich fool was focused on the “HERE & NOW” instead of the “HERE-AFTER.”

We do not live forever on this earth --- in James, chapter 4, verse 14, we are told that we

“*are a mist that appears for a little while & then vanishes.*” ***In other words, life is short!***

Perhaps that’s why Paul wrote these words: “*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what*

is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

You might say the rich fool had a VISION-PROBLEM – he was focused on the wrong things.
He thought he had all-the-time-in-the-world to enjoy his goods...his stuff, BUT HE DIDN'T!

The moral of the story – it seems to me – is that if we spend hours each day enjoying our stuff
and our things (*which are all temporary*), shouldn't we spend at least as much time on our souls?

Brothers & sisters, don't make the same mistake as the rich fool!

Don't forget about your ETERNAL life! Don't forget about your soul!

Let me close with a true story – one morning, in 1888, Alfred Nobel was quite surprised to read
his own obituary in a French newspaper. Obviously, it was a journalistic mistake.

One of his brothers had died & a careless reporter had used a prewritten obituary
of the wrong man.

But as he read, Nobel was SHOCKED & DISTURBED to learn what the world really thought of him.

He was seen simply as the dynamite king who had amassed a great fortune out of explosives.

Nobel had hoped his inventions would be useful to people & to nations;
yet he was viewed as one who dealt in blood & war for profit.

At that moment, Alfred Nobel resolved to show the world THE TRUE PURPOSE of his life.

He revised his will so that his fortune would be dedicated to the recognition
of great creative achievements – with the highest award going to those

who had done the most for world peace.

From then on Nobel's image began to change.

Now – more than 130 years later – we remember him the way he wanted to be remembered.

Today, we all associate Alfred Nobel with the Nobel Peace Prize.

<https://www.history.com/news/did-a-premature-obituary-inspire-the-nobel-prize>

What do you want to be about?

What do you want to be known for?

What gives your life meaning?

My hunch is that your answer WILL HAVE LITTLE TO DO with your earthly possessions.

Amen.