

Soul Talk – Based on Luke 12:13-21

Aspen Community UMC

August 5, 2007

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This is one of those parables. A parable is a simple story – a kind of extended metaphor

A story with spiritual and moral implications

Here it is:

The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully. And, he thought to himself,

“What shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops.”

The land brought forth plentifully, not necessarily because of the man’s skill or capabilities to farm the land. We simply don’t know about the skills or abilities of this individual,

just that the land brought forth plentifully.

And the person whose land had brought forth plentifully said,

“I will do this. I will pull down my barns and build larger barns.

And, there I will store all my grain and my goods.

(not only the crops but his things whatever they are)

Now for the critical statement:

And, I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years;

take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.”

This is a more important kind of communication isn’t it? –

with oneself with one’s soul – with the deepest part of ourselves.

This is not just speaking to myself, it is, “I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years, take it easy, eat, drink, and be merry.” And, the divine reply is:

And, God says to him, *“You are a fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? This is what happens when one only lays up treasure for himself. This phrase, “I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years*

- because of the bigger barns.

This is a clue to me that this parable is about the human being at the soul level –

perhaps we might consider it the spiritual level –

perhaps an eternal part of us as human beings or the part closest to God – if there is such a thing.

And in calling this message, “Soul Talk,” I mean to point to a deeper language we have –

a deeper conversation that we have going on with God

when it comes to holding too tightly to things that are best not hoarded.

Because when they are hoarded, they will either rot, decay, be lost,

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or have some kind of adverse effect
simply because it is in the nature of things to grow and change, to increase or decrease,
but never to stay the same.

It is in the nature of things – the nature of the universe – to circulate and transform.

Barns store things for a season – for the protection of animals and their food.

They are a part of farming and cultivating the land.

This thing about barns reminds me of childhood,
because we lived on a couple of acres, and my father had a barn that he stored things in.
After a few years he built another barn when the first one got full.
We always talked about my father building more barns when he had more things to store.

He was not storing grain except for some feed for sheep and goats and chickens –
and that was cycled regularly. Most of what was in the barns was stuff –
things he would collect – all kinds of stuff –
tile from Mexico that he used a hobby – several years before.

There was an antique printing press and, an antique trunk than he might someday restore,
and all kinds of tools and small collectibles. Many of them were arranged on shelves.

It was fun to go in there from time to time and explore.

He had the space. Why not build a barn?

The problem with that was not then. It is now.
Because I still have some of that stuff that I have not gotten around to going through it.
You never know what treasures might be there. I might want to restore that trunk,
or display that picture, or pass on this or that to my own children.

It is a good thing that the parsonage is pretty large,
because I have a number of those things from my father's barn that need going through.

Because, when my father died, he did not take them with him.

Barns are for protecting animals and for storing food for a season, not a lifetime –
barns are for living things – that are a part of a cycle of agricultural life.

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Carl Jung wrote about dreams, and symbols that occur in dreams.¹ He said that a barn in a dream may mean something about the dreamer's making use of abilities, success, or well-being.

That is, when I dream about a barn I may really be trying to think through, or struggle with,
my own abilities, my own success or well being.

Jung also said that a barn in a dream can represent a place of protection against rain and cold,
and it can be a place where demons and ghosts reside.

In our scripture's soul talk, someone is building a barn because they have been successful.

And they want to store the fruits of their success in their new large barn.

At the same time, demons and ghosts are also residing in this barn,
because of the nature of things. And, they are likely to come and haunt him.

This is certainly the story for the man in our parable.

For in the parable, just as soon as he has built his new and larger barn,
he is going to lose his life.

He thinks the barn will be a place of protection,

But it will turn out to be an encounter with the ghosts and demons of his life,
that is, in his death.

The soul talk in our parable is about dealing with wealth, or the results of our successes,
with those riches with which we are entrusted.

There seems to be some responsibility on a spiritual level to not hold too tightly, to not place it in
such a way that it no longer lives, no longer builds, no longer grows and changes.

Barbara Wilder wrote a book called *Money Is Love*.²

It is about reconnecting to the sacred origins of money.

She traces the history of money as we know it
from the time people began to live in communities and tribes.

People traded things of value, and the most significant item traded was food.

Because food was sacred, the act of trading was also sacred.

Grains were the biggest trade item.

The rituals around planting and harvesting indicate this.

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The trading of the grain was a sacred transaction.

To cheat would be to break faith with the divine.

There was this connection to earth, and what came from mother earth was sacred.

By the time metals were introduced around 4500 BC, money in the form of grain and other traded foods had existed for a very long time. And, it was a divine exchange.

When metals were introduced, jewelry, goblets, and cauldrons began to be made of copper, gold, and silver. These things were given to gods and goddesses.

Coins were introduced in part to pay soldiers, for in war, there was no way to pay a soldier in grain.

Abstract thinking began to emerge, and with it our use of symbols.

The spiritual and material world began to separate in people's minds.

Even so, money remained the connecting bridge between the two worlds.

To signify this link between heaven and earth, the two worlds,

coins were imprinted with the head of a god or a god symbol

on one side and secular symbol on the other. Take a look at some of your coins and you will see this.

Money as the link between heaven and earth lasted well into the Roman period.

But as the spiritual underpinnings of the Roman Empire dissolved, money, for a time, lost its divine connection.

It is a fascinating history, but for the sake of simplicity, it was not until the industrial revolution that money really lost its link to the spirit altogether and came to be considered a secular commodity –

something like what happened in Rome – perhaps when this story was written.

However, from the earliest history we have uncovered,

we can see that those transactions of foodstuffs,

that then became coins, or checks, now plastic, and now even virtual money— there still remains the connection to the sacred.

And, in whatever form, money is energy.

What we know about energy is that it must flow freely.

Hoarding creates a wall of stopped-up energy.

And, Barbara Wilder will say, and others also, that since money is energy it is subject to the laws of physics.

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Collectively we as a species have decided that there is not enough money for everyone –
and there are those who are saying this is a belief that may not be accurate.

However, the point I want to make is that money too,
must circulate in order to increase in value,
to transform whatever is around it.

She is saying that what will be important is for us to reunite money with its spiritual roots –
thus to make money love.

Her point is that money as love has the power to affect every person in every corner of the world.

The principle is very simple, and yet at the same time difficult to comprehend.

Money circulates the planet constantly. It changes form from dollars into rubles and lire, etc.

It crosses borders, but continues to circulate. This is its nature.

It is like the rivers and streams – and everything it touches it affects in some way, just as the rivers
and the oceans affect every part of the planet they touch.

Or it's like in the human body, blood flows and carries nutrients to maintain life.

However, and this goes back to our parable, when the energy that is money is infused with fear,
greed, anger, and scarcity,

it flows throughout the world carrying destructive energies
or it becomes clogged and simply dies.

Again, we are back to our parable. *“What will I do for I have nowhere to store my crops? “I will do
this. I will build larger barns. 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;
take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.”*

And the divine response is that such is a foolish thing to do.

For when you are no longer here, whose will they be?

There is a poem by the poet Rumi. It is also about this same thing, this thing I believe is a principle
of how things are. What I like about it is that here is this same thought, or phenomena coming from
an artist in another culture. Our parable comes from the Christian tradition. I suggested a similar
idea that comes from a contemporary American who sees herself as bridging spiritual and secular (if
there is a separation), and here the ideas is again,

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written around the 12th century in Persia. It goes like this:

Neither the sun nor the moon could lavish their light

If they stayed motionless as a rock.

How bitter the Euphrates and Tigris would be if they stayed in one place like the sea!

The air that stagnates in a pit becomes poisonous;

Look how the air sickens because of its inertia!

When the water of the sea travels towards the clouds

It frees itself from bitterness and acquires tender power.

When a fire stays without shooting out flames

It transforms itself to ashes, dead and destroyed.

And Rumi, writing from his own Islamic tradition, continues...

See how Jesus, son of Mary, in his continual wonderings

Became the Water of Life and made the dead rise.

I have shown you a few signs; now, learn the rest yourself:

*Accomplish the journey beyond yourself and reach God.*³

This takes us to where we began, to the story Jesus himself told.

They call it the parable of the rich fool, because the divine calls him foolish.

But is he so different than you and me

from time to time – when we have fears that paralyze us?

When we hold so tightly to either our abilities or our possessions

That nothing comes of them.

The divine calls us to let it flow, let it live, let it enrich others.

The divine calls us to let our talents, our gifts, and our abundance flow through this world.

May we consider the parable and the insights it has for our lives,

our families, our church and in our communities.

¹ Vollmar, Klaus. *The Book of Dream Symbols*, p.27

² Wilder, Barbara. *Money Is Love*, pp.23 and forward

³ Harvey, Andrew. *The Teachings of Rumi*, p. 39