

**Sermon for 8-4-19 ("What I Learned at Camp" Sunday)**

**Gospel -- Luke 12:13-21**

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I was at church camp last week, along with a handful of others folks from this congregation. As we sat around the embers of the campfire Friday night, we joked to each other about how the worst part of camp is the fact that it has to end -- that we have to leave this place, this community of peace and love and gentleness and go back to our regular lives.

The bumpiest moment in an astronaut's journey is re-entry, right? The last 24 hours have been an especially rough re-entry for me... but this is not about me. This is about all of us.

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The man in the parable: his farmland produces abundantly, he's got this plentiful harvest, and he has a dilemma -- all his crops won't fit in his barns! What to do?

He has this great idea -- *I know! I'll tear down the barns I have and build bigger ones, big enough to store all these extra crops -- and then I'll be set for life! I'll be comfortable and secure and I won't need a single thing for the rest of my days... it'll be amazing! I'll be living the dream!*

But -- here comes the rub -- the voice of God breaks into the story. The man is a fool, because it turns out he is going to die that very night, and all that wealth can't do a thing for him. So much for living the dream!

Jesus gives us the moral of the story: "So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."<sup>i</sup>

So it is with those who live in a world of I-me-mine.

So it is with those who whose care and concern never goes beyond their own front doors.

So it is with those who forget God until they're face to face with their own mortality.

So it is with those whose hearts are hardened, who turn away from the violence and suffering of this world.

And so it is with us, when we live and act like God's not there; when our faith in God makes no difference in our choices and our lives.

This parable, just like all the parables, is a little world constructed by Jesus to teach us a lesson. Notice that Jesus doesn't say anything about the man's religious beliefs or practices. He might be an observant Jew, or he might not. It doesn't matter, because even if he is religious, even if

he performs the rituals of faith in God, he doesn't live faithfully. He doesn't behave as if God exists. If he really knew his Creator, if he really believed, he would not keep those abundant crops for himself. He would not build those bigger barns. He would not rest in his own comfort and contentment and believe that he has done his life's duty.

If this man really knew God, his barns would be smaller, but his heart and his world would be **so much bigger!**

If it makes us uncomfortable, that's the point -- we're supposed to recognize ourselves in the parable, and be challenged by it, and then change our lives accordingly. Through the parable, Jesus is calling us to a better way of living -- a way that is marked by love of God and neighbor, not by love of self.

Most of us are just stumbling around, trying to be faithful, trying to open our hearts, trying to live as if God matters to us... but it's not easy. It's hard to be compassionate and humble and kind in a nation obsessed with fame and wealth and power. It's hard to have an open heart in a nation that tells us to close ourselves off and fear those who are different. And it's hard to be peacemakers in a nation that worships weapons designed to kill scores of human beings quickly and efficiently, a nation that refuses to acknowledge its own pervasive sickness.

But, my friends, we have to do better than this.

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Two mass shootings in the last 24 hours? Twenty children of God slaughtered in El Paso yesterday, and then, while we were asleep in our beds, just down the road in Dayton -- nine more killed? The numbers may be higher by now... Last weekend it was the Gilroy Garlic Festival in California, and a few days later it was shoppers in Mississippi...

What is wrong with us?

Are we really willing to live like this?

And if we are willing to live like this, to just accept this carnage as the inevitable price of our freedom... **do we really know God?**

Or are we like the rich man in the parable, going through our days as if the One who made us has no impact on our choices, our activities, our way of life?

I refuse to believe that this is the best we can do.

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Here's the thing about being at church camp, the reason I love it so much. Being at camp is like living in that more perfect world we're all striving towards, a world where people actually care about each other, where we respect each other's dignity, where we never forget that every person around us is another reflection of the image of God.

What if we lived like that here and now? What if we lived like that every single day?

Once there was a place where people of different ages and different skin colors and different backgrounds played together and laughed together and danced together and ate together and praised God together.

In this place, families with two mommies or two daddies do not hover on the periphery, unsure whether or not they're fully welcome.

In this place, single parents don't feel exhausted, because someone will always scoop up a crying baby or play hide and seek with a wily preschooler who can't sit still.

In this place, teenagers read Scripture and pray and cry together and ask hard questions, and no one tells them to stop or keep it to themselves or leave.

In this place, people living with autism and disabilities aren't stuck sitting alone, and no one stares at them.

In this place, some people have come from multi-million dollar homes, and some people have come from homeless shelters -- and they all live together.

In this place, everyone is safe, and everyone is worthy.

In this place, people let down their walls. In this place, strangers become friends. In this place, no one is alone, and we know God is among us.

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Our task as Christians is to bring our knowledge of God's presence with us wherever we go, out into the world, and to answer Christ's call in every time and place. Not just on Sunday mornings, not just at camp. All the time, everywhere.

The rich man in the parable? He just needs to remember. To remember that God is real, God is alive, God is always present, God sees and knows all. He needs to remember that God is a God of compassion, and justice, and peace -- and that this God has a claim on his life. This God makes demands of him, of us.

This is the gift of the parables -- we listen, we see ourselves in the story, we move in and out; and bit by bit, we learn and we grow. We learn about ourselves, we learn about each other, we learn about God, and we make the proper adjustments. We do whatever it takes to live more faithfully, to give and to serve and to speak and act for justice and peace in this nation and in the world -- whatever it takes to answer God's call.

We don't let our comfort, or our busy-ness and distraction, or our ridiculous, sinful political partisanship get in the way of coming together and doing right by our Maker and each other.

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Friends, what I learned at camp is that we are better than this.

With God's help, we can do better than this. We can live better than this. We can be people of love and peace and justice. And we **must**. Amen.