

## Sermon on Luke 12:13-21 (Year C Proper 13) - The Parable of the Rich Fool

By the Rev. Mel Stanley

In today's Gospel, we read an obituary of sorts about the Rich Fool. Obituaries are about the life, not the death. The death is the occasion, but it's usually reported in just one sentence, maybe with a detail—a disease, a condition, a struggle, an accident – and an age. We appraise: *so young; a long life; so sudden; a shock*. The death releases the facts of the life into view very often via obituaries and the most engaging obituaries function like a window or sometimes like a mirror.

Today's Gospel reading is a parable but it is a parable which provides something like an obituary of the life of a Rich Fool. Like any obituary, it can function like a window or a mirror and Jesus is using it for that purpose here. Jesus puts it before us. Do we see through it to some truth? Do we see ourselves? Some of both?

The fact of the death releases the details, shows them for all to see. The rich man's wealth wasn't his, a fact his death makes clear. Just when he was trying to expand his tight grip on what he thought belonged to him, death loosened it. Permanently.

But the rich man isn't the first person to have his plans interrupted by death. Why call him a fool?

Not because he's wealthy. At least, that's not stated in the parable, and in Jesus' day, it was the same as in ours: money is a tool. Money funds, builds, clothes, feeds. Money builds hospitals, houses the homeless, teaches the illiterate, supports the arts, feeds the hungry. Jesus depended on the money of others to support him and his disciples. Jesus praised the woman who poured expensive perfume on him, preparing him, he said, for his death. Jesus was buried by a rich man who placed him in his own tomb. The fool's foolishness is not that he is rich. It is how he used it and how he behaved towards his wealth.

But let's be realistic: wealth can also divide, wall off, distract, lure, occupy, possess. And so, Jesus gives the rich fool's obituary this introduction: "Beware. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed." And by "all kinds of greed", I think Jesus means the seeking to possess a whole lot of anything—money, power, influence, anything—because in seeking more and more, in the greedy quest for more there will never be enough, and we know the unjust lengths to which people will go. We can spend our lives building bigger and bigger metaphorical or literal barns and using others in their construction. When we die, our obituary can report we left behind a whole lot of earthly power, prestige and possessions but we can still be impoverished toward God.

Rich toward God or poor toward God. Before we think that's just a quaint way to describe how we and God have a nice thing going, or how we're missing out on something that would improve our lives, biblical literature seems to take the idea of a godly banking system very seriously.

If we think that treasures and saving them have only to do with accumulating things, money, whatever, for ourselves, we're missing our most important savings option. If we think that treasure and how we accumulate it have only to do with our time on earth, we ignore a whole realm of possibilities for genuine wealth. There's a whole other banking arrangement, a whole other treasury where riches can be stored and accumulated. We all have access to it. It accepts deposits of all kinds.

Jesus himself advocates this savings plan in Matthew 6 and tells us its benefits extend beyond this life: "Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:20-21).

The fool looked rich, but he was putting all his investments in a plan that goes belly up every single time.

So, we need to ask ourselves if the Parable of the Rich Fool is a window for us into the mistakes of another or if it is a mirror of our own mistakes... This Parable asks me, you and everyone in this congregation to place our trust in something more durable than the volatile fluctuations of a global economy. Instead of banking on more and larger storage barns, God invites all into the eternal economy of Christ's grace and mercy.

If God were to write your obituary today, what would it say? "My good and faithful servant" or perhaps "she preserved for God's Kingdom to the end" or perhaps "foolish squanderer who was given much and squandered it all" or perhaps "quietly faithful" or perhaps "he never stopped serving and loving my flock". What we do with our life, how we behave towards others, our actions and most of all our disposition before God, these things matter, more than money or wealth or health or comfort. So, in the week ahead, what can we add to our treasure store not on earth but in heaven? What can we do in the week ahead for God's Kingdom to enable God to say of us by next Sunday that we were rich towards God?

Amen.