

“The Demand of Our Barns”¹

The Gratitude Campaign – part #4

Luke 12:13-21

When I was a child, I loved to play in my grandpa’s hay mow above the barn. It was huge, full of hay bales, which were perfect for building forts and playing hide-and-go-seek with my cousins. I simply enjoyed the vastness of it all. The hay seemed to go on forever. Every once in a while, I would see grandpa throw a bale or two down for the cows to eat, but I never thought that the barn could actually be emptied. There was just too much hay stored in it.

Now, most of the time, I went to visit the farm in November and December, for the holidays. I remember how shocked I was one early summer when I actually worked for my grandpa to harvest the hay. I went up into the hay mow to play around, and it was completely empty! I learned the hard way how to fill a hay mow, so that the cows could eat all winter long.

Saving for the winter, or for a rainy day, or even for retirement...those are all good things, right? I started a savings account when I was about ten. I remember being excited to see the balance grow as I mowed lawns and deposited my hard-earned money. I was always told that saving is a good idea. It is a good idea! “Economists wish that we would put a little more energy into filling up our barns.”² We know that as Americans, we are addicted to debt and credit cards. Instead of saving, we spend way too much on ourselves. Less than half of all Americans have even \$1000 in their savings.³ We seem to have the opposite problem of the farmer in Luke 12. We aren’t hoarding up for the future, we are

¹ Based on a sermon of the same title by Craig A. Satterless, in Preaching and Stewardship (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2010.), 61-64.

² Ibid., 62.

³ Ibid.

spending our wealth on ourselves here and now. We want the biggest, the best, and the fastest, and it is so easy to buy now and pay later.

However, Jesus seems to be saying in this parable that saving is not a good thing. Or is he? Let’s look at this scripture a little closer, because, even those most of us are not farmers, there is a huge implication for us in this story.

The story is set up by an argument between two brothers. One of them, probably the younger one, complains to Jesus that his older brother is not being fair about splitting the inheritance. He expects Jesus to reprimand his brother so he can get what he wants. Jesus, however, sees past the superficial issue of inheritance traditions and gets to the heart of the matter. “Watch out!” he warns. “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” (Luke 12:15)

Jesus goes on to tell this short story. A farmer got a bumper crop and decided to build new barns in order to store it up so that he could rest easy. “Eat, drink, and be merry!” was this man’s retirement goal. Instead, God indicated that the man would die that very evening, and all his wealth would go to a stranger. The End. Nice happy story, Jesus. Not.

I admit, I like having things. And I get tripped up into thinking, “If I just have a little more, I’ll be better off.” If I have enough stored up in my savings, in my retirement, and in my house, I’ll be able to survive any tragedy, right?

Here is the strange thing: Jesus says the farmer’s life is being “demanded of him,” but he doesn’t say, by what. “We can all name people who found themselves in situations where tragedy strikes and all that they have amounts to nothing.”⁴ But in this parable, it doesn’t appear that this man is sick. So what

⁴ Ibid.

demands his life? Is it his desire to take it easy in the future? How many of us want to enjoy our retirement? That shouldn't be an issue with God, right?

Yes, we can all think of tragic things that could demand our lives in an instant. Accidents. Illness. Even things that aren't terminal could still shake us to our core. Unemployment. A dysfunctional family. The loss of our child, spouse, or close friend. Those would all “demand our lives of us.”

But what if something more sinister, more inevitable may be demanding this farmer's life? Look again at Luke 12:20. Note, the Lord does not say, “This night, I demand your life of you.” The sentence is in passive tense. Something demands his life. What if it is not God, or tragedy, but in fact, the man's barns themselves that demand his life? They demand his work, his attention. They need to be painted, filled, maintained. Take the word “barn” and replace it with anything we desire: a big house, a new car. “The abundance of possessions can end up demanding our whole life.”⁵ We lose our families because we become slaves to our possessions; we hardly spend time with people because our toys require upkeep and repair. Instead of finding fulfillment in work, rest, and relationships, our possessions possess us. We fear for the security of our things. Stuff causes us anxiety. It robs us of real life.

This parable and God's announcement of impending death are not a judgment, but a warning. Jesus does not want us to be fools. No one wants to live each day as if we were going to die “this very night.” But neither does God want us to trust our security to things. We are not supposed to trust what is created, we are supposed to trust the Creator!⁶ “When we attempt to find life by

⁵ Ibid., 63.

⁶ Ibid.

enslaving ourselves to our possessions, we wind up dead, not because God turns his back on us, but because we empty ourselves of all the real life that God gives us.”⁷

When I read this parable, I noticed something alarming. Nowhere is there an indication that the farmer ever thought of anyone else but himself. He does not think about giving any of his abundance to the poor or even to his family. He only says he wants to store it up for himself for the future. This is the ultimate picture of greed, and it is fatal to our souls. And the truth is, this sickness can be found in every one of us if we do not heed Jesus’ warning.

According to verse 16, Jesus says that the ground produced the bumper crop. It was not the man’s own hands or work that provided the abundance. It was a gift of the soil, the sun, the rain – all things out of the farmer’s control. The same holds true for all of us. All the wealth that we have is given to us by someone else. My salary literally comes from the generosity of others. I do not produce or create anything. Neither do you. God is the ultimate creator and giver of our property. We can work for it, we can earn it, we can be stewards of it, but not a single one of us can create wealth from nothing. Only God can do that.

This parable challenges us neither to abandon our barns nor to give away everything we possess. Rather, this story challenges us to ask, whom do we trust? Both today and in the future, do I believe more in money or in God?

If we just spend our money on ourselves, going after bigger and better barns, that will consume our lives and leave us empty. We don’t need more money. We need more faith. We need to trust God for the future, be grateful for

⁷ Ibid.

what we have now, and use our possessions to benefit others. Remember – God wants us to be grateful for the things we have, not greedy for more. The challenge Jesus gives us is to trust our security to him, not things.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, said to earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can. Are we hoarding up possessions that are stealing our lives? Or are we trusting God for our peace and security? God, in his wisdom, gives us a choice. God makes us stewards of all that he has given us. How we utilize those gifts will determine how much we grow in faith, grow as Christians, and grow as a church.

Memory Verse: Luke 12:21 (NLT)

"Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."

Reflection Questions:

1. Are you generally a spender or a saver? Why?
2. Have you ever wished for "bigger barns"? What do you wish you had more of? Less of?
3. Have you ever been blessed by a sudden windfall? What did you do with it?
4. How has God provided for you? How do you display your gratitude?
5. Would you consider making a commitment to support the work of the Lord in Bellaire in 2019? You can fill out the card on the next page and email it to eric.bcumc@gmail.com.

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

I am grateful to God for _____

I love that God uses our church to _____

By faith, as God enables me, I will —

- Pray regularly for the ministry of our church.
- Attend worship services as I am able and invite others to attend with me.
- Allow God to use my talents, gifts, time, and leadership to serve in our church.
- My estimated giving to the Lord's church in 2019 is: \$ _____ per week/month/year

Pastor's challenge: Try tithing (giving 10% of your income) for at least three months. If in that time you determine that you cannot afford your basic needs (rent, food, and utilities, etc.), tell Pastor Eric and he will personally refund your giving.