

Luke 12:13-21

When you open your Bible to Luke 12:13-21, it says in the heading, “The Parable of the Rich Fool.” This can be misleading. We may come to the conclusion that the man was a fool because he was rich. Most people are not rich in their own estimation. So it would be easy for most to ignore this parable of Jesus, thinking that it does not speak to them. But what if the parable was not the Rich Fool, but the Poor Fool? Or even the Middle Class Fool? Or the Upper-Middle Class Fool? You get the point? The man in the parable was not a fool because he was rich. He was a fool, says Jesus, because he was not rich toward God.

This morning I’m going to take the liberty of changing the title of this section of Scripture for the purposes of this sermon. Rather than call it the Parable of the Rich Fool, I’m going to call it the Parable of the Rich Full. Let me show you why. As I read verses 17-19, listen carefully as I emphasize each pronoun. The man in the parable is thinking to himself here. *“What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops? I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, 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; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”*

Did you happen to count all the words that were emphasized? Nearly a dozen times in these three verses does this man use the words, “I,” or “my.” He is all about himself. He is a fool because he is full of himself. He is so full of himself that there is no room for God. There is no place for God in his past, in his present, or in his future. He is not grateful to God for his blessings. His present activities are occupied with everything but God. And his plans for the future do not include God. The man is self-possessed. He can be called the Rich Full, because he is full of himself and all that he treasures.

Now whether you call yourself rich or poor, or somewhere in between, the most important word is not the first one, but the second one. It’s not wrong to be rich, but it’s sad if you are a rich fool. It’s not a tragedy to be poor, but it is if you are a poor fool. We may use the term “middle class” of ourselves, but the word that follows is of the highest importance. Now the thing about the Rich Full is that he did not see himself as a fool. In his eyes he was a success; an inspiration to others. But it’s not how we see ourselves that counts. It’s how God sees us. And in the parable it’s God who calls him a fool.

What does God call you? We don’t have to wonder about this. We know what He calls us. Because you are baptized into Christ, God calls you His dear children. He does not call you a fool. Rather, He has called you in Christ to know the fullness of His love. He has blessed you with every spiritual blessing. He is here in the present with His gifts for you. He has guaranteed your future with His sure and certain promises. He does not, in any way, call you a fool.

This does not mean, however, that we never act in ways that are foolish. It is not wise, but foolish, for God’s children to engage in wickedness; to act like those who are not God’s children. It is not wise, but foolish, to put the world before God; to set aside our Bible in the home because we’re too busy; to put work, rest, or play as a higher priority than worship; to disregard the hearing of God’s Word and reception of the Sacrament because we don’t have time for such things. God does not call us fools, but there are times when it’s difficult to tell the difference between us and a fool.

This is because we, too, become full of ourselves. We may, or may not, use the words “I,” or “my” in our speech like the Rich Full did, but whether we sound like him or not, we often act like him. We fill our days, our weekends, our thoughts, our schedules, our plans with so much that there is barely room for the Lord. I’m not saying that your days are filled with sinful things, but neither was this the case

with the man in the parable. He was simply busy making money and planning his retirement. But he was a fool because he was full of everything in life except the Lord.

Each and every one of us, in hearing this parable, should feel shame for how we have acted in the past. And if we do, then it's God who is at work bringing us to this awareness and leading us to repent.

Contrast how God thinks and acts with us poor sinners. God is not full of Himself. Rather, He is full of pity for sinners like us. God does not think to Himself, "What shall **I** do with **My** world and **My** power?" Rather, He empties Himself and takes on the form of a servant and is made in the likeness of men. God does not say, "Where shall **I** store all **My** stuff? **I** will do this: **I** will build larger barns for **Myself**." Rather, He takes the path to the cross with no place to lay His head because He is intent on building a mansion for you in heaven. God is the exact opposite of the Rich Fool. Jesus became poor for your sake. He is filled with love and mercy toward you.

Friend, what this means for you is that God is not full of anger against you. He does not count all the "I's" and "my's" in your speech and in your actions. Instead, He counts what Jesus did for you on the cross as payment in full for your sins. God forgives you. You who are full of yourself, God forgives. You whose past is filled with wrongs, God forgives. He is at peace in His heart with everyone of you. It's because of what Jesus did for you.

Now within you who believe this, Jesus lives. He fills you with His Spirit so that you are rich toward God, so that your thoughts and days have Christ at the center, so that you live not as foolish Christians, but as wise ones. God leads you, He draws you here to His House where He fills you with His words of promise. He prepares you for an uncertain future. The Rich Full, being full of everything but God, was unprepared for death and he perished. But here, through Word and Sacrament, your Lord comes to you so that now, and every day, you are ready to meet death because you are full of God's promises in Christ Jesus.

They say that funerals come in three's. We've had two in the past three weeks. Which one of you will be next? Maybe it will be me. Do we need to worry? No. Fools should worry. But for you who are full of Christ, you are prepared. Your life and your eternal soul are in His hands--His hands which were pierced for you. Amen.