

Some of you ‘thespians’ out there might have gotten the thinly-veiled reference in today’s sermon title to a fairly well-known Shakespearean play, *“Much Ado About Nothing.”* It is a romantic comedy whose fundamental themes are that of **misunderstandings, love, and deception**. Hmm... perhaps that is why the great playwright’s work is so TIMELESS! Are not our present-day lives marked by ‘misunderstandings, love, and deception.’ And while there are some nuances to the meaning of that word ‘nothing’ particular to Shakespeare’s time, the phrase today is commonly interpreted to mean **an overreaction to something that shouldn't have caused so much trouble**. Again, pretty relevant to our current human experience...

As we read today’s Gospel reading, that title of a play written some 600 years ago could also well relate to Jesus’ experience in this story. We see how an inheritance caused acrimonious **misunderstandings** amongst two brothers. The **deception** experienced by a rich landowner by placing his priority in his possessions. That what matters most is not how one cares for one’s ‘stuff’ and ‘self’, but rather, how one demonstrates his/her **love** of God and God’s people.

And so, let us consider how this parable of Jesus illustrates the importance of not ‘overreacting’ to ‘something that shouldn’t cause so much trouble.’ In this case, wealth. Possessions. ‘Stuff.’ That, in paraphrasing Shakespeare’s language  $\geq$  about ‘nothing,’ we too must guard against **“Much Ado about ‘Some-things.’”**

Now, as we begin our consideration of this **“rich man”** ... or, as many of the translations entitle this passage, **“the Parable of the rich FOOL”**... we might ask ourselves if that moniker is being a bit too harsh. Like Martha got that bad rap for simply trying to get her work done in an equitable and efficient manner, couldn’t we also argue that the rich man is a wise and responsible person. He has a thriving farming business. His land has produced so abundantly that he does not have enough storage space in his barns. So he plans to pull down his barns and build bigger ones to store all his grain and goods. Then he will have ample savings set aside for the future and will be all set to enjoy his golden years.

Isn’t this what we ALL are encouraged to strive for? Isn’t it wise and responsible to save for the future? The rich farmer would probably be a good financial advisor. He seems to have

things figured out. He has worked hard and saved wisely. Now he can sit back, relax, and enjoy the fruits of his labor, right?

Well, yes... BUT. There is one very important thing the rich man has not planned for — his reckoning with God. But God said to him, ***“You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (Luke 12:20)***

The rich farmer is a fool not because he is wealthy or because he saves for the future, but because he appears to live only for himself, and because he believes that his security in life lies solely on what he has accumulated. He has bought into the world’s lie that our ultimate happiness lies in the ‘stuff’ we have ‘stored,’ rather than in the ‘**substance** of the **Savior**.’

Going back to that ‘comedy’... and remember, ‘many a true word is said in jest’... there is a thought-provoking statement made by the lead female character, “Hero” (interesting choice of name... ‘Hero’). She declares that ***“Some (people) Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps.”*** One could insert the name of ‘Satan’ in there as well. AKA, the “Deceiver,” the alluring voice of evil would have us put stock in ANYTHING except Jesus. That is why our Lord responds so strongly to those brothers who want him to settle their ‘disagreement’ over the family inheritance: ***“Take care! [Watch out!] Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” (12:15)***

I would hazard to say that there are very FEW people in this room who have not personally witnessed families that have fallen into this ‘trap’ of Satan called ‘GREED.’ Particularly when it comes to ‘inheritances.’ There are probably few places that the expression ***“the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim 6:10)*** has been made more real than in family arguments over money. Which is why Paul goes on to *complete* that quote by saying that ***“... and in their eagerness to be rich, some have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”*** There may indeed be some of you who have personally been ‘pierced through with many sorrows’ over family money arguments. Discussions over money that have likely ‘wandered’ FAR ‘from the faith.’

Even though the word ‘bread’ as a synonym for money is a much more modern term, perhaps its use might be appropriate here in Jesus’ words in Matthew 4:4: ***“Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*** As you and I consider

just how to best manage our 'daily bread'... the resources God give us each day... now often do we consult ***"every word that comes from the mouth of God."***? God's Word to us both **Written** and **Spoken**... in the Bible and in our prayers...

From two brothers fighting over an inheritance, to the rich landowner so concerned about hoarding his wealth, they both dealt with the issue of GREED. But besides ignoring the power of greed in their own lives, they also neglected the NEED in other people's lives. Particularly the latter farm owner, who clearly had no regard for anyone but himself. In the 3 verses where he is deciding what to do, he uses the personal pronoun "I" or "my" some **12** times. ***"I will do this; I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. I will say to my soul, you have ample goods for many years; relax, eat, drink, and be merry."***  
(Luke 12:17-19)

Pretty high on himself, but sure doesn't show too much concern for anyone else. Not those who helped him to reap those 'ample' crops, or in the surrounding villages. Or in the One who is the provider of that harvest... and the reaper of that 'soul' he spoke to. He was great at storing up treasures for himself; but not so much with being rich towards God, or God's people. It's ALL ABOUT HIM. There was another line out of that play that resonates here: ***"There's not one wise man among twenty that will praise himself."*** A corollary of one of my favorite expressions: "He who declares himself a 'self-made man' has a FOOL for a maker"...

Finally, in speaking of 'fools' I would call your attention to the picture of our 'rich fool,' surrounded by his bags of grain. **[pic]** It was actually found not by me, but by Carla Washburn, elder and secretary for the LC Church. It is entitled "The Man Who Hoards," by James Tissot, 19<sup>th</sup> C. French painter. [For those worshipping online/reading this message, you can simply do a "Google" search for this Luke passage, click on "Images," and you will find it in the first few lines.] Few things I noticed. One, look at his face. Young or old? I always thought of him as being a fairly young man. But this depiction is a reminder that 'foolishness' is no respecter of age or stage in life. The decisions we make on how we spend the resources whose true source is GOD are important at EVERY age. Including TODAY!

Another interesting aspect is his hands and face. With one hand he is stroking his chin, as though pensive in making his decisions. But where is he looking. At his other hand. A hand

that looks like it could be holding a CELLPHONE! You're thinking, 'yeah, RIGHT!' And while the phone WAS invented by Alexander Graham Bell ABOUT the same time as this picture, it hadn't progressed QUITE that far yet. But my point is that if you update this man's wardrobe and surrounding 'riches,' this could be US: Staring at our phone for wisdom, for gratification, for fulfillment... rather than looking into the eyes of our Lord. Being 'rich in technology' rather than 'rich in God'...

And speaking of God, I would finally draw your attention to the top of the picture. It's hard to see, but if you look closely, you can see in the background an image of an individual with white robes and wings with a sword drawn. I'm 'guessing' that this is a depiction of an 'angel of death,' sent to fulfill that statement of God's in verse 20: ***"You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"***

None of us knows when our time on earth will end. No one knows when 'our life will be demanded of us.' And the 'things that we have prepared, whose will they be?' The truth is that our lives are not our own. Everything we see on this earth is God's. We are merely stewards of what we have. Too often we can be fearful of having 'enough' for this life. When what we should be most concerned about is the life of the world to come. And NOT just for ourselves. But for all those 'rich fools' we know who think that their lives ***"consist in the abundance of possessions."***

I read a quote attributed to an anonymous 'seasoned pastor' that went something like this: "I have heard many different regrets expressed by people nearing the end of life, but there is one regret I have never heard expressed. I have never heard anyone say, 'I wish I hadn't given so much away. I wish I had kept more for myself.'" Death has a way of clarifying what really matters.

As you and I consider 'what really matters' in these earthly lives of ours, may be mindful of just how we are not merely 'storing up treasures for ourselves,' but also are 'rich towards God.' Which includes caring for the 'riches' of other people's **life in Christ**. May we live by that mantra of our Presbyterian heritage: *"Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda."* "The church reformed, always BEING reformed." Or, in another quote from Shakespeare's play, **"Happy are they that hear their detractions, and can put them to mending."**

As we **listen** to God, **learn** from the Son, and **follow** His Spirit... as we hear and take heed of those 'detractions', those negative, unhealthy attitudes that need to be changed... our lives can be 'put to mending.' To being 'reformed.' To 'decrease' ourselves that we might 'increase' in Christ. In the words of Paul, ***"Set your minds on things above, not on things on earth... for) when Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory."*** (Col. 3: 2, 4) And THAT, my friends, is truly 'much ado about something!'

**CHARGE:** Even though Shakespeare's writings were FAR from 'theological' in their intent, there are yet spiritual truths to be found all around us... sometimes in the most UN-likely places.

Benedick, a central figure in this play, spoke these words to Hero, whom he dearly loved:

**"I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be buried in thy eyes."**

May these words also be ones we would speak to our God, whom we also are to dearly love.

[repeat] As we go forth to be 'rich towards the God we love,' we do not go alone. But that the Spirit of the living God...

**[Slide after Bene]** "SOME PEOPLE ARE SO POOR THAT ALL THEY HAVE IS MONEY."