

As many of you know, we moved in our house here in Martinsville about six weeks ago. My husband Clint and I were here as the moving truck came and unloaded all of our things, all of the boxes. Clint returned home to finish his ministry back in Missouri, and Gwendolyn and I set ourselves about the task of unpacking. Well, Clint arrived here in Martinsville to join us this past Friday, and I must admit that there are still boxes of stuff everywhere! Boxes in the living room, boxes in the dining room, boxes in the kitchen. Stuff, stuff, stuff.

When we were in the process of packing up all this stuff, Clint was reminded of a comedy routine that George Carlin did many years ago. He said, “That's all you need in life, a little place for your stuff. That's all your house is: a place to keep your stuff. If you didn't have so much stuff, you wouldn't need a house. You could just walk around all the time. A house is just a pile of stuff with a cover on it. You can see that when you're taking off in an airplane. You look down, you see everybody's got a little pile of stuff. All the little piles of stuff.

And when you leave your house, you gotta lock it up. Wouldn't want somebody to come by and take some of your stuff. They always take the good stuff. They never bother with that [old stuff] you're saving. All they want is the shiny stuff. That's what your house is, a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get...more stuff! Sometimes you gotta move, gotta get a bigger house. Why? No room for your stuff anymore.”

The rich man from our story this morning is surrounded by a lot of stuff. His fields have yielded in abundance and now he has to figure out what to do with all of it! As Jesus depicts them here, his possessions, or stuff, is not evil. But it is clearly a transitory reality, one that can disappear as quickly as it comes. The rich man, who has spent his time and energy storing up his worldly possessions and now has “ample goods laid up for many years” discovers that his efforts to prepare for his future will

be wiped out in a single night. And all the things that have belonged to him will in an instant belong to another whose identity he does not even know.

The rich man considers no one but himself as he ponders the dilemma of his expanding wealth. His private monologue is filled with “I-statements,” “my-statements,” and “you-statements” addressed to his own soul:

And he thought to himself, “What should I do, for I have no place [where I can] store my crops?” Then he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and [I will] 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; [you must] relax, eat, drink, be merry.’”

Here, the rich man exhibits no need for anyone beyond himself. He does not consult any outside parties, but speaks only to himself. Neither does he consider alternative options for resolving his difficulties. Sharing his wealth with those who have need is nowhere in his thinking. His vision extends only to himself. His possessions have closed his eyes to the world around him and obscured his vision of people in need.

The way we use our money and what we do with our stuff isn’t just a matter of prudent investing and economic sense, it is a matter of our very souls and our very lives.

Our value is not correlated with the value of our possessions, of course. And because of that, when there is an abundance of goods, Jesus seems to be saying that sharing is the way to go. That was the mistake of the rich man. He could have known an incomparable joy in the short time he had left, if he had spread out the abundance of his goods among the community.

Richard Swanson, in *Provoking the Gospel of Luke*, observes that the rich fool “imagines that his fields have produced for him, and that such abundance exempts him from future work, and (more crucially) from present sharing.”

This past week I was at Montreat with a group of young people from the church, and the keynote speaker told a story that reminded me very much of this scripture. He told us of a friend of his, Julio, who is a social worker in the Bronx. Every night Julio got off work, took the same subway, and ate at the same diner. One night, he got off the subway and was met by a teenager with a knife. The teenager said, "Give me your money," So, Julio handed over his wallet. As the teenager was walking away, that is, at the very moment when Julio could have run away to safety, something told him to make a different choice. And so he said, "Hey, hang on a minute." And the youth turned around, still with the knife in his hand, and Julio said, "Hey you forgot something, it's cold out here tonight, why don't you take my jacket too."

"Why are you doing that?"

"Well, I just thought that if you are willing to risk your life, and to risk years in prison, so you could have a few dollars, you probably need this more than I do. I mean, I was just gonna go to dinner...hey, do you want to go to dinner with me?" So Julio and the young man go to dinner. And because this is the place that Julio eats every night, people come by to talk to him. The hostess comes by, the waitress comes by, the dish-washer comes by, the other regulars come by. The young man is like, "Do you own this place?"

Julio said, "No, I just eat here a lot."

"But you're even nice to the dish-washer!"

And Julio said, "Well, didn't your momma teach you that you should be nice to everyone?"

"Yeah, but I didn't think anyone actually acted like that."

So, Julio was nice to him as well, they continued to talk throughout the meal, and Julio asked him what he wanted to do with his life, and the young man couldn't answer. Finally the check comes and Julio says, "You know, you're gonna have to pay for this, because somebody robbed me earlier." And the young man takes out the wallet and he slides it across the table, and Julio opens it and pays the tab, then he takes out a twenty dollar bill and slides it across the table, because he thought the young

man could use it more than he would. The young man looked at him, and then he took the knife out of Julio's jacket, and he slid it across the table, because the young man didn't want to use it anymore.

This is a story of what it might look like to be "rich toward God," of what it might look like to define our life by more than our possessions.

Too often we use things to fill the hole inside us, we act out in violence, or we think that consuming more and more things will satisfy our hunger. But Jesus says, "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry, whoever believes in me will never thirst." (John 6) Jesus can satisfy our soul's hunger, not with the things that pass away, but with his very presence that always remains with us. And we then share what we have with those who are in need. Julio shared table with the troubled young man, and shared with him in his need.

The theme at Montreat last week was, "In these Waters," and we talked about how in our baptism we are claimed and called good, and on the last day, we talked about how we could go back to our homes and churches and share what we had experienced. The keynote presenter shared what he called, "slam poetry" with us, that he had written, about this very topic. He named his inspirations as Dr. Seuss and Kanye West.

A man with an expensive necktie turns to Jesus, "And what do you do?"

"I make things, I'm a carpenter"

"Ahha, a carpenter!?"

"Yes, I make things. I can make anything," Jesus said, "In fact that's what I've done. I made the heavens, the moon, the stars, the sun; the Dixie Chicks, the iPad, the cinnamon bun; but not only that, the concept of fun, the mystical poet John Donne, the unexpected pun, and this old rubber hen that says, 'I'm number one.' Over there just for fun, that cloister full of nuns. I did not make Styrofoam or the sub-machine gun. I did make the cats, the mouse, the duck-billed platypus, but also the northern lights, the burning bush, the whispered 'I love you,' the sacred hush, I made them, I can make anything, in fact I made so many anythings they became everything."

The man in the necktie said, "Oooh"

But Jesus wasn't through, "And when things are broken, I make all things new. The girl who cuts in the tub, the boy in the back of the club slapped around and thrown about, the old man who doubts, the widow who cries at the table, the young man who isn't able, I make all things new. So when your Armani necktie feels like a noose, and you understand too late you made the drastic mistake of making money when you should have made a life, I'll be there. Why? Because I made you too, and Boo, I can make you new."

Jesus says, "I make things, you should make them too, therefore go and make more of you. Baptize in water, in these waters of grace, announcing to every tribe, people, or race, that there's only one answer

to my question, 'What should you do?' and that's love one another as I have loved you. Now a final thing for you to comprehend, lo, I am with you always, I am with you always, always to the end."

Jesus can make us new. Jesus invites us to come to this table and eat the bread of life, to share in his presence and be satisfied. Amen.

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