

Title: A Theology of Enough

Text: An

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I ask us this question, and I believe it is a most serious question as individuals and as a nation. Friends, “when is it that we have enough?” From the “All We Can Eat Buffet” to a wardrobe full of clothes and freezers full of food and a TV in every room, we, in this country, struggle with our desire for things. We like our “stuff.” We like to collect many diverse kinds of “stuff.” Does anyone here today a garage that can no longer be “parked in” anymore because it is filled up with so much other “stuff?” Does anyone have drawers that we can no longer open because we are afraid the stuff will spill out of the space and onto the floors? Does anyone present have so much stuff that we now rent a storage space so that we can relieve our house space of stuff, and we arrange for visitation rights to see our “stuff?” Friends, we love our “stuff,” don’t we?

Sometimes humor can express what we find most difficult to say, and the late comedian George Carlin was particularly good at finding humor in those dark areas of our lives. One of his most famous comedy routines was his monologue on “stuff,” and he proclaimed jokingly that the “meaning of life is trying to find a place to put your stuff.” He added, “A house is just a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get more stuff.”

While George Carlin makes fun of the idea around stuff, reality TV shows all kinds shows about “stuff.” My son, Jordan growing up was fascinated with shows dealing with “stuff.” I want to mention two of them.

- Storage Wars: In this show, abandoned storage lockers were sold on the auction block. After the padlocks were cut, a bidding war among the “stuff vultures” begins hoping to make a profit off someone is left behind stuff.
- Antique Road Show: Gives attention and value to stuff from our past.
- Hoarders: Has anyone seen this show? An “hoarder” is someone whose life is swallowed up by their “stuff.” Because of a psychological condition, someone is unable to throw anything away and their whole identity and life is defined by their collected piles of stuff.

Those reality TV shows are our entertainment as this culture struggles with stuff, and while we think we may be immune to the problem, the ruthless self-truth is our stuff preoccupies much of our attention, money, and time.

I will offer us one more struggle that we might not even recognize but is a part of our “stuff.” Do we have an online automatic back-up system to back up our computer? Do we save our files to the all-knowing and all-saving “Cloud” so that we do not ever lose any of our on-line “stuff?” Friends, we spend enormous amounts of our resources and time worrying about old files, years of e-mails, photos, and just general information. These become our electronic “stuff,” but we need to recognize the root is still “stuff.”

In today's gospel text parable Jesus makes it all too clear how our "life" and "stuff" are not the same. Notice the focus is on "stuff." Jesus begins his parable with the rich man who enjoys a bumper crop and congratulates himself on his plans for safely storing all his valuable stuff. He is so proud! And in his pride, he looks forward to a future devoted to "relaxing, eating, drinking, and making merry." He wants to retire and live comfortably, which is a nice visualization! We all want that too, don't we?

Now I want us to notice the turn in Jesus' story. The rich man, who is preparing for his life of leisure, is informed by God that his life on earth abruptly ends before retirement begins. All those big, new and shiny storage units and wealth was not meant for his use. For he dies.

So, this parable leaves us to ponder the question, "What is it that Jesus finds most unfaithful in our rich man's fantasy of his future?" Is it our enjoyment? No, that is not it. We know it is not eating and being merry. Jesus was at the wedding party and most weddings are fun! We also know it is not relaxing and taking joy in life. Jesus did that too. He went away from time to time to relax away from the crowds.

So, what is Jesus wanting us to see? What is Jesus telling us is the rich man's problem? Notice Jesus' point is our rich man's focus on himself to the exclusion of all others. Idolatry begins with an "I" and this rich man has a focus in life is fixated on "I."

- *He asks himself how he should deal with his good "problem" of over-abundance, and he tears down his barns and he builds new ones but gives no thought or attention to sharing gifts with others. It is for him to consume.*
- *He self-congratulates himself on the answer he produces that benefits only himself and does not include others in his good fortunes.*
- *He rewards himself with the bounty and forgets that it came from God alone.*

So, Jesus is not condemning the rich man for having money. That is not the point. Jesus' story condemns the rich man's ego for having "I"-solated his money so that he could control it. He believe the false understanding that the axis of the world runs through the center of our heads, and because of this belief he sought to control the things God has given us to benefit only self.

We know that Jesus was interested in turning our attention away from self and toward God and neighbor in love. That is the focus of our reciting the Law each Sunday. We are to engage in the world and creation and not "I"-solate ourselves and build barns for our stuff.

As we look at the life of Jesus, we discover he was particularly interested and invested in people, and as Christ's body on earth, Jesus wants the same for us. He did not isolate himself from the world. Instead of building a church, Jesus used his healing hands on the decaying flesh of the people with leprosy and on the dead bodies of Lazarus and the little girl. Instead of sitting still at the temple gate and calling people to him, Jesus' life and ministry was dramatically spent going out among the outcasts and sinners touching the untouchables and embraced the unlovable. In other words, as the Son of God Jesus did not look for building a bigger, better barn for his

enjoyment and retirement. No, he humbled himself and got his hands dirty, and when we go to places like Cuba or Graceworks or Mountain TOP or Appalachian Service Project or FISH builds, we are living not as the rich man but living as our Jesus lived.

The most dramatic example from Jesus came the night before the Passover and before his arrest when Jesus did not build a barn but lowered himself to the dirt floor to lovingly wash the filth off of his disciple's feet. Recall Peter's response. "No, Lord, you cannot do this to me." "Yes, I can and if you want to be a part of my life and ministry, you will let me." "Then not just my feet, but my head and hands too!" "No, Peter. Just the feet are necessary." Jesus showed us and he wants us to continually work with our hands and not build better barns. Jesus commissioned us to go into the world and engage the world, in his name.

Jesus did not object to the rich man's money. Not at all! Jesus objected to his not using it on behalf of the world. What he objected to was the man's serving himself alone because he wanted to protect his "stuff." Jesus wants all of us to be engaged with the world transforming the world like he did one person at a time. Jesus wants us to leave a set of footprints of where we have invested our hearts and souls. Are those footprints heading to the barns we build or to the people that are in need? Our theology of enough includes our examination of how we investment of our time, treasures, and talents, and may our exam results reflect our love for God and love for our neighbor as ourselves.

And "someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I will do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to myself, "You have had plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."'" "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'"

"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Prayer of Illumination

O God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us so that the scripture we are about to hear will become God's Word for us today. Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Luke 12:13-31 The Parable of the Rich Fool

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?'"

Then he said, "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. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."

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?"

So, it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."