

**10 Pentecost, Year C, Luke 12:13-21**  
**St Matthew's Episcopal Church August 1, 2010**  
**Robin Teasley, seminarian**

If you have been here often, then you know that many times when Bob and Ruth preach, they have a visual aid or a sermon prop to help illustrate the sermon. Well despite these voluminous vestments this morning, there is nothing up my sleeve! My sermon prop would not fit up my sleeve or in this room. But many of you, if you lean left or right, can see my visual aid...and if you cannot see it from where you are sitting, then I think you can imagine it, because it's right outside.

What we have here at St. Matthew's, which I do not think any other church in our diocese possesses, is a barn. As I sit at my desk in the Little Red House during the week I have a beautiful view of the barn, and I have been pondering it all summer. So when I read the gospel to prepare for the sermon this week, I will admit that it made me more than a little uncomfortable!

We have a barn; we know that at some point we will take it down to build a bigger building. Sound familiar? The more I thought about this parable the more I squirmed. Talk about the elephant in the living room...we have a barn in the backyard!

A barn is an agricultural building used for storage, to house livestock or store farming equipment, grain or hay. We don't have any of that so we don't need the barn and can pull it down. Good. That's a relief! But I love that old barn. It's a landmark, a sign of another era. In my sermon research this week I came across a website just for barns! No kidding! Barns R Us! Did you know that you can buy parts to restore your barn? You can list your barn for sale – restored or as is. You can even buy a barn and renovate it into a house. This seems to be the newest trend as there was an article with photos in The Wall Street Journal just this past Friday that extolled the virtues of barn living at its finest! So clearly there are some people who are as attached to barns as I am!

Others do not have this attachment. Old, dry, wooden barns are fire hazards. This is a concern for many of our vestry members, and buildings and grounds people. What is the danger and liability of keeping this barn? And so we *will* be pulling it down at some point.

Like the rich man in today's parable, we are planning to pull down our barn and build a bigger building. This is what was making me uncomfortable as I reflected. Were we in any way to be compared to the rich man? Because God did not have anything good to say to him about his plans to pull down his barn to build something larger. God, who never speaks in any other parable, does speak in this one, calling the rich man a fool.

At first glance, it seems an unfair accusation. What had the rich man done wrong? He does not seem to have cheated anyone in acquiring his abundance, and he was planning for his future, for his retirement. Perhaps he was just preparing in case there was a bad economic downturn. Don't we all do that? Isn't that good stewardship?

The Greek word for “fool” is *aphron*, and its original meaning in the text is not quite the same as we would define it today. A fool was not stupid, but ignorant – that means he simply did not know, because he had not been taught. The rich man did not know that he was being self centered. He was just busy trying to take care of his own concerns, trying to make a living, saving up for the future, and protecting his hard earned possessions. But notice the number of times the rich man says “my”...my crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, my soul. He is focused on nothing but himself.

To be honest, I think we can all admit to having a narrow self focus from time to time. Life gets busy, complicated. We are stressed by our many responsibilities and by the pressure of being surrounded by a cultural mantra of “more, more, more”. And then we need bigger barns in which to store all our accumulations. It’s a never ending cycle, and before we know it, we are not consuming stuff but our stuff is consuming us! The problem is not about having wealth; it’s about what we do with it. Wealth creates the illusion of independence. Martin Luther King, Jr. said in a sermon on this passage that the rich man failed to realize his dependence on others and failed to realize his dependence on God.<sup>1</sup> This pretty much sums it all up. But no matter how big your barn is, or what you have in your bank account, it will not protect you from things like cancer, broken relationships, or from the final reality of the end of mortal life. No amount of stuff can assure our eternal future. At some point, our lives *will* be demanded of us...and what will become of all our stuff? Where is God in it all?

God is the source of all that we have. In the parable of the rich man, the land produced abundantly at God’s command. What do you suppose God was hoping the rich man would do with that abundance? What do you suppose God is hoping for St Matthew’s? After much pondering I am certain that the people of St Matthew’s are not fools. But the caution for us in this parable is that we be careful not to become like the rich man, storing up treasures for ourselves – thinking only of ourselves and forgetting about everything that is around us. It is enticingly easy to get caught up in the mantra of more. But sometimes, having more in life often translates into having less time for God. The challenge for us is to be rich toward God. What might that mean?

This parable is about more than money. It is also about time and talent. As we present our offering each week there is a statement that we make affirming God’s place in our lives. “All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.” We are living in an abundant land here at St Matthew’s, which produces many crops - beautiful children, warm hospitality, an amazing food pantry, and a deep desire to grow and to serve others. We are rich in gifts, faithfulness, and vision.

So what if we pull down our barn and build a larger worship space with more classrooms? What if we invite neighbors to come and see Jesus among us here? Will they see us being rich toward God? Will they see a community engaged in teaching the children in Sunday School and providing a loving nursery and children’s church? Will they see a vibrant youth program, volunteers in the food pantry, and altar guild members

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Why Jesus Called a Man a Fool”, sermon delivered at Mount Pisgah Missionary Baptist Church, Chicago, IL. August 27, 1967.

providing a worshipful setting? Will they see people of all ages seeking to learn more about God; seeking to deepen their spiritual relationships with God? And will we invite everyone to join us in sharing this abundance?

“All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.”

Will we be like the rich man, or will we be rich toward God?

*Amen.*