

Letting Go, ...Taking On
Scripture Lessons: Colossians 3:1-4, 12-16, Luke 12:13-21

The parables of Jesus, are just illustrations – ways to make an important point real by a picture or a story where we can see ourselves living the point of the lesson. It's the reason we sometimes prefer a Children's sermon to the Adult sermon – beside the fact that they are usually shorter. Adult sermons are “three points and a poem,” children's are one illustration and one point. Jesus preaches some adult sermons without the poem, but most of his lesson were parables – one point, one illustration. Like today: the one point that leads to the illustration is right there in the text, ...

“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

Not many of us are farmers, rich or not. Farmers these days are not building bigger barns. Unless the land is big production by a big corporation, farmers are working a day job to try to keep the farm in the family.

Not many of us are rich; we just live like it. We city folk don't have to be farmers to need the extra barn. Nowadays, we call an extra barn a “storage unit.” It's a growth industry in modern America.

I have a storage unit, in part because one side of our garage is stacked with stuff. The unit is temperature controlled – because contains a very large theological library I have accumulated from years of reading, buying, and inheriting from my best friend who was a seminary professor. It has dawned on me in my moving around that a library packed away in 30+ boxes is a pretty useless abundance. I'm starting to wonder why I keep it when I haven't dug into most of the boxes in a while. But I do go digging from time to time. They are still useful now and again.

The unit also has the utilitarian and useful furniture and pots and pans I have used while living on the road the last seven years. I may need them again in a while, so they are neatly organized and ready for the next haul.

But I had a revelation about abundance of possessions in moving back home this time. The storage unit is not my problem. Most of the stuff in it is useful, waiting for its next use.

My problem is closer to home – in my closet. The few clothes I hang in my closet traveling here and there working as an “interim” do just fine, but putting them back into the closet at home is an exercise in “press and cram.” I don't grow crops, but I have clothes “laid up for many years.” I don't need bigger barns, but the closet is too small. Well, maybe not. If I got by just fine on fewer clothes for a year or more, why is my closet crammed? ... Know what I mean? Sure you do. Are we all living the point of the lesson here yet?

It is not the useful stuff that makes us rent storage units, so let me ask this one question: *Why do we fill our closets, houses, storage units, with our over-abundance?*

I mean, even a rich farmer was going to make use of the crops he was storing. When was the last time you used some of the stuff you are saving and know you will probably never use? We are way past “surplus.” We have an over-abundance past surplus!

“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

Greed is a deadly sin – one of the seven deadly sins. “Rich” and “greedy” are different things. I am blessed to know some really rich people who are wonderfully generous in the full use of their riches.

We think rich is those people who have more than we do, and we think they are rich because they are greedy. We see the stereotypes of riches that convince us we are *not* rich and *not* greedy, because they have bigger barns than we do – the guy with 3 houses here and far away, or the gal with a four full closets – one just for shoes, or the company that can’t be content to make a good profit when it can lie, cheat and steal to maximize profit.

I’m with you on that kind of greed, but not being rich is no insurance against greed. The early followers, most of whom had none of those things, remembered the warning in Jesus words and saw themselves in the illustration. They worried about greed.

Like the text says, “there are all kinds of greed.” Greed is accumulating all kinds of things that are useless to us. Over-abundance is just the result. Greed is the need to accumulate. It’s looking for life in the next thing and still needing the old thing. It’s looking for the next thing until we find life in looking for the next thing. It’s in the *need* to “have,” to possess. We don’t have to be rich to be greedy.

“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

The need in greed that is deadly is in the wrong measuring – measuring life in the wrong abundance of possessions, defining success as accumulating things, needing to own until we have to satisfy the needing, the desire to control until our need to control becomes a way of life. And greed isn’t just about getting more, it is about adding more to the pile.

The deadliness of greed is in the holding on, until we live with adding on until we think life is in the adding on. Our sin is the not letting go. We want to add meaning and purpose and direction and fullness to life by adding on, not letting go. If we just had... If I could just go to... Life is good, except that we always want better. At the same time, we spend our energies trying to keep hold of what we have. We rent storage units. We want more without giving up what we have. Our lives are good enough that we don’t want to risk what we have even for what we want. We don’t have the barns yet. But we want the full – eat, drink, and be merry life of ample goods. We have to save, and keep, and hoard. Greedy is not just wanting something else. Greedy is not letting go when we take on more.

What do you gain when you gain the whole world, but wind up losing your life in a pile of what you have gained because you can’t find life in the stuff? What happens when our lives are

so full we can't take on the new direction that would free us, set us free from the abundance that has become surplus baggage? We are surrounded – imprisoned – by stuff, ...and it's not even "treasures."

Jesus' one point is that we can fill our living up with an abundance of possessions until we measure life by stuff. Our lives gets absorbed in having stuff, taking care of stuff, getting more stuff. The more we own, the more we are owned by stuff. And all the time we are thinking, "What fool would just live day-to-day and try to break even at the end?"

Now let's go back to my problem with my closet. I've got more good clothes than I can wear, but I still keep some old shirts and slacks I want to wear out before I wear the newer stuff. Or I buy a new shirt and think I'll give away some old stuff (someday when I can get around to it). Then I stuff it in the closet. All this is more thought that the stuff deserves. Who's the one who's foolish to think that much about stuff?

Now that I am home, I realize I am beyond extra. I am at "over-abundance." And what I am beginning to want is ... some space to put the stuff that is not surplus where I can find it and use it. I want to get rid of the need to stuff.

Are you with me? Can just one or two of you identify with my closet problem, garage problem, storage unit problem, crammed drawers problem? Are you tempted to go home and start cleaning out? Just tempted, aren't you? Not fully committed, are you?

I'm not going to call you what God calls the guy with the barns, but I will say that my Bible calls this "the parable of the rich fool." We don't have to be rich or build bigger barns to be...

So I come to this Table, and see simple and clean and useful. There is no need for extra stuff on this table. I see stuff differently, and I see my life differently. I'm foolish. I'm foolish not to put useless stuff to some use. If I let go of some stuff, there would be room for, ...well, just room – if I don't rush to fill the room up with similar stuff.

What I am wanting is space – a space that is open in my life to be able to wait and welcome the thing that comes. I want an abundance of space that is not a possession that winds up owning me. I want to do some letting go, so I have room to take on something that is not like the things that are just good for letting go.

I want to let go of that stuff in my life that is the wrong abundance, so I can have open hands to take hold of something different. I'm looking for something light that I can carry with me all the time, something small that is still precious and useful. I am open to something that will point my life in the right direction and fill me with some purpose and meaning without filling up to my closet.

What I really want is something that is useful to the people I love, the life I love, the world I love, ...something better than the stuff I stuff, ...something that could even be more useful the more I gave it away.

I want to say "yes" to life that lasts past the bigger barns. I want to shape my life in the doing more than the possessing. I want to find the added gain in my living by what I give away, both

the possessing that binds me and the loving that frees me. I want to turn my possessions into resources and tools and gifts for loving.

What if I just find a place where I can give away the stuff that is making me foolish, and I open my life to something that will never weigh me down or hold me back, ...something small and light and always enough, that still goes deep enough and makes life full? Look how much we can receive from simple and clean and useful.

I'm just going to sit here for a while and stare at this table, and open my heart and hands to see what God might put in them. I'm going to listen for his voice to tell me, "This loaf and cup is worth letting go of your old life, losing your whole life. This Table means taking on a new life – my life. And the more you live my life, give away my love, the more you will have. No barns can hold this love. My love is big enough for the whole world, and it is enough for your whole life."