

“Godspell: The Parable of the Rich Fool”
Luke 12:13-21

Last Sunday was Super Bowl LIV and of course the best part for many people was watching the commercials. Here is one of the funniest commercials:

<https://youtu.be/Q6qchztaw9g>. These commercials have become a big source of revenue. It is estimated that the cost of a commercial is \$5.6 million, almost double the cost in 2011. The big companies compete for the best spots and ideas for such ads because the pressure is on for selling products to consumers. And the result is that we are often promised a better life and more happiness if we get the products or experiences which the commercials are advertising. One commercial that was surprising to me was about insurance. It talked about the different types of love in a way that sounded very much like a sermon: <https://youtu.be/-3LTR32dMgl>.

The biggest problem with feeling like we always need more is the sense of lack of contentment in life. What we have now never seems to be enough, regardless of how much or how little we have. This also translates into thinking that we are never enough. Who we are at any given moment is not good enough! And this is not only limited to material possessions. Our lack of contentment could be related to our experiences, accomplishments, self-image, or relationships. As a result, we end up chasing after illusions and even hurt ourselves, others and God’s creation to get what we think we want.

Today’s parable came as a response to a conflict between two brothers over possessions. The conflict between the brothers is an example of how this drive for more could bring so much pain into our world. A man came to Jesus asking for help to get more wealth. He wanted Jesus to convince his brother to divide the inheritance with him. He was seeking something that was against the way people of that time practiced economics. In ancient Israel the oldest son was to receive a double portion of the inheritance, which in Greek, ***Kleronomia***, meant specifically, “real estate,” or land. This way the land which was given freely to the people of Israel would stay divided equally according to families and tribes. The man’s request of Jesus was an indicator of greed because what he wanted was his share of the land so that he could take it away and separate himself from the rest of the family. Normally what families did was keep the land and work it together instead of dividing it up into small pieces that would not be able to support a whole family. What the brother was looking to do was going directly against the way the people of Israel were called by God to share the land. That was why Jesus refused to be an arbitrator between the brothers. He also challenged the man about his ways of greed. The parable that Jesus told did not condemn wealth or good crops. It did not condemn good financial planning with the man wanting to build a bigger barn for more storage. The parable did not imply that the man was going to go to hell for all of this. What the parable hits hard on is the foolishness of greed and selfishness. The farmer in the parable talks to himself and the whole conversation is focused on his own interests: “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops? I will do this.” The whole time the farmer is focused on number 1, himself. This is what provokes God to call the man foolish.

The greed and selfishness of the man are some of the strongest traps we fall into as human beings. Part of the struggle for us is falling for the "wisdom" of the world around us. We think that people are happy because they are rich or accomplished. We envy what they have and want to be like them. But Jesus cuts through all of our false wisdom to show us what truly makes us happy and not just us individually but also as a society.

The good news for us today is the shift away from greed comes from living by the values of the kingdom of God. The parable reminds us of our own mortality as a way to wake us up from the illusions of the world. I believe that the most radical message of the gospel for us today from Luke 12 is that it reminds us that life needs to be lived with our view of the big picture in mind because that big picture includes our mortality. We don't live forever. Yet, our worries about money and our planning often reflect a false sense of immortality. The man in the parable is reminded that all of his greed was going to come to a screeching halt with his death. This kind of harsh reminder is needed in times when greed becomes the dominant way of life.

Try this exercise from Bernie Roth at Stanford. Answer one question at a time.

Imagine you have 10 min to live, what would you do?
And ten days?
And ten months?
And ten years?
And the rest of your life?

Another exercise to consider is the one found on the card you received when you walked in about writing your own obituary.

Last week, the Buffalo news published a piece by a man by the name of Dennis Erickson who came face to face with death and learned some important lessons about his life. He had a sudden cardiac arrest and almost died. He wrote, "This experience has strengthened my spirituality and eliminated my fear of death. I have a much greater appreciation for the time I have left knowing that it can change in an instant."

And so today I would like to invite you to name before God anything that weighs you down or that makes you feel like you are not enough and that you need more of in order to find contentment and peace. Take a few moments to name that before God.

I would like to leave you with a poem called "Travelling Light" by Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Because sometimes we
travel heavy
and those heady times we
can barely
imagine the freebody
movement of
dance.

Because sometimes we
travel dark
and from those hard paths we
can't even
conjure an image of
sunrise
or moonrise
or starlight
or fire.

Because sometimes we
travel solo
and those lonely times we
forget all the others
we've travelled with
lovingly
travelled with
home.

Because sometimes we
need to be
travelling lightly
because sometimes we're in need of
regular reminding
that light comes in circles
and waves
and small moments
and light
comes to find us
and light comes with hope.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDxNkaNlxb4> Amen.

Write Your Own Obituary Exercise

By Gustavo Razzetti

1. Start by writing your name the way you'd like it to look on your tombstone.
2. In one line, how did you make the world a better place? Be concise. The more focused, the more honest you'll be with yourself.
3. Write down how people will remember you. Avoid pompous language. Stick to the tone and words that regular people would use - especially those who know you well. The why is essential (once again, you don't need the full laundry list).
4. This part requires more introspection. Look yourself into the mirror and answer this unfiltered: "who was the real you?" Not your masks or costumes, not your job or titles or roles. What was your essence? What made you unique?

5. Saying 'yes' is easy. What we say 'no' to defines who we really are. What were the 'temptations,' distractions, or possibilities that you said 'no' to because they would derail you from achieving your goals?

6. Who will miss you the most? This seems easy, but it's not. The answer is not about what you wish, but about trying to understand who will really miss. A lot of people will for sure. But who were those people to whom you meant something special? Once again, avoid judging yourself. Being honest is what makes this exercise meaningful.

7. Now it's time to be creative. The previous steps provided the background; now it's time to bring it your epitaph to life. Write down in one or two paragraphs the words that you would love someone to say about you once you departed. This is the most critical part of the exercise. Connect with your true essence, not your vanity.