

## Luke 12:13-21

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 towards God.'

### "In God We Trust"

John Harrison began his reflection, *With All Creation*, with these words from the closing response to the daily morning service at Iona Abbey: *We will not offer to God offerings that cost us nothing.*

Easy to say, Harrison commented, but not so easy to obey once we leave the confines of the church. Whether it is climate change, biodiversity, pollution, recycling, squandering of resources, animal welfare, or genetic modification, it is so easy to acknowledge that there is a problem that we should be doing something about it, and then to do nothing or very little---certainly nothing that imposes a cost to our lifestyles, our time or our pockets. How many of us have reduced our fossil fuel energy usage over the past twelve months? How many of us have not switched to 'green tariff' electricity supply because we believe it will cost more? How many of us have stopped buying goods that have been flown in, at great 'carbon cost', in favor of local produce? How many of us buy exclusively fairly traded goods,

even if they are more 'costly' than other brands? How many of us are prepared to reject highly polluting and costly air travel for our holidays? To do any of these things would be at least a token acceptance of our responsibility to God's creation. It would be an offering to God that did not cost us nothing.

John Mead, in a recent article in *Green Christian*, the magazine of Christian Ecology Link, writes of 'Christian denial', with specific reference to climate change. But he also says that 'denial about change is just one manifestation of a much wider state of denial about our affluent culture as a whole.' He quotes the economist Herman Daly who refers to 'the enormous forces of denial' embodied in the cultural assumptions of rich societies. John Mead says that these are 'assumptions that have to be overcome before we can begin to live sustainably, that is, in ways which do not wreck the planet' (p. 240).

Jesus tried to help his disciples overcome their denial and to confront their shared assumptions about wealth that were embedded in the culture, society, and political environment of first century Palestine. In the scripture lesson for today, Jesus began his teaching when an unnamed person in the crowd made a specific request of him. Complaining through an undercurrent of anxiety he said: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

Now anxiety is a common human experience. Anxiety is good in that it gears us up for tasks at hand, it aids us in our problem solving, and it helps us escape from danger. But anxiety often turns bad within us when it becomes what we commonly call 'stress'. World War II survivor, Flora Wuellner commented (*Holy Ground*, p. 31):

Anxiety can rise not only from actual danger, but also from unhealed anger, grieving, emotional shock, fatigue. It can also rise from depressions due to chemical imbalance. Anxiety is deep in dysfunctional communities: family, workplace, churches, neighborhoods. It is deep among those trapped in rigid belief systems, especially among those fixated on 'end times' such as the spreading apprehension about prophecies concerning the 'doomed' in 2010!

Because Jesus could see that there was more to the rich man's request than feeling doomed and insecure about his financial future, Jesus said 'no' to him when he asked Jesus to be his financial advisor. Jesus said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" Jesus told him 'no' so that the man would have to take a deeper look at himself, his anxiety, and his greed. Take care, Jesus said. Be on guard for all kinds of greed, for one's life does not consist in the number of one's possessions.

After that Jesus told them the parable of the rich fool. Now the rich fool was neither a bad nor evil man. He was however, one who was so anxious about his life and net worth that he had become addicted to securing and accumulating wealth for himself. He failed to see that his windfall of wealth was connected to the well being of his surrounding human and Earth community. In *Provoking the Gospel*, theologian Richard Swanson noted:

The rich fool imagines that his fields have produced for him, and that such abundance exempts him from future work, and from present sharing. Economies work because they are knit together . . . both earning and sharing are essential to the fabric of God's world.

In his anxiety about securing wealth for "me, myself, and I", the rich fool mistook the community's wealth and the earth's produce of which he should have been a steward, for his own. Anxiety filled the core of the rich fool's self. God had been pushed out to the margins and forgotten. He forgot that everything he had was a gift from God. He took much and gave too little back in return. Seduced by the cultural voice to build bigger barns and bank accounts, the rich fool bought into the illusion that he could secure his own welfare. In the parable, after the rich fool had torn down his small barns and built bigger ones, he said to his soul: *Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.* So God said to him, "You fool! this night your life will be demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So it is for those who store up

treasures for themselves and are not rich towards God. You fool!

*“What I’m trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God’s giving . . . steep yourself in God-reality, God initiative, God-provisions (Eugene Petersen, The Message).*

After meditating on Jesus’ spiritual teaching on anxiety and greed, John Van De Laar composed the poem/prayer, Enough.

Worry and stress are not hard for us, God,  
we do them without thinking.

There is always the potential of threat  
to our security,  
our comfort,  
our health,  
our relationships,  
our lives,

and we foolishly think that we could silence the fear  
If we just had enough money,  
enough insurance,  
enough toys,  
enough stored away for a rainy day.

It’s never enough, though:

the voice of our fear will not be dismissed so easily.  
But in the small, silent places within us is another voice’  
one that beckons us into the foolishness of faith,  
that points our gaze to the birds and flowers,  
that, in unguarded moments, lets our muscles relax,  
and our hearts lean into loved ones.

In unexpected whispers we hear it,  
calling us to remember your promises,  
Your grace,  
Your faithfulness;

And suddenly, we discover that it is enough. Amen.