

**Charleen Jongejan Harder**  
**Kern Road Mennonite Church**  
**Sermon Series: “There’s Enough for All!”**  
**November 5, 2006**

Text: Luke 12:13-34

Reader #1 – Luke 12: 13-21

Reader #2 – Luke 22-34

Not enough Barns!

The Parable that \_\_Ruth\_\_\_\_ just read is not a comfortable story. Wouldn’t it be easier if this story wasn’t in the Bible? Wouldn’t it be easier to just skip over it – just skip ahead to the good part that comes right afterwards, the part that \_\_\_\_\_Terra\_\_\_\_ read –? ‘Consider the lilies of the field.....Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear... The comforting part, the inspiring parts, without guilt or worry.

But no –in Luke’s gospel, Jesus tells this story about a man with a good harvest who plans to store up this good harvest in large barns. He’s going to finally set his mind at ease concerning his future, and then God comes to him and tells him that tonight he’s going to die in his sleep. All his planning and storing for the future is in vain. A heart attack maybe? A stroke? It’s a tough story. Not a comfortable story....

What’s going on here? Is planning and saving for the future a sin? Is setting aside some of today’s abundance for future needs become an act of greed? Convict me then – I’m saving for retirement. Convict any of us who has money in the bank. Convict anyone who saves up money for a down-payment for a house, car or education. Convict someone who finally has a financial windfall, a good harvest, a good market return, whatever and puts that money in the bank for the future. Convict just about everyone I know; we’re guilty, then...

What do you hear when you hear the story Jesus tells, about the rich man storing away grain in his barns, and wanting another barn or two to put away the excess?

Do you feel condemned for storing away for the future?

Do you feel condemned for having a retirement plan?

Do you feel condemned for having money in the bank, clothes in the closet, food in the fridge?

I know that in reading this parable, I have felt condemned for these things. I have been angry. I have felt the heavy hand of God on me, holding me back from the good things of life - pushing me towards a life of anxiety – where I would only have just enough money for the day, food for the day, and anything more than I absolutely needed for the moment should be given away for the work of the church and for the poor. The heaviness of that thought pulled me down, and pulled me to the text.

But this past summer, I looked closely at the text - and the text looked closely at me. And we were both transformed. It's a new text for me now: Listen with me once more to the beginning of story. Look it up, if you like. Luke 12: 13ff

A rich man's farm produced abundantly. He's just had a really good year, a fabulous harvest. He's doing well in his business..... but he can't sleep at night. He is restless. He's worried – he's worried because his barns aren't big enough for all that grain.

Did you catch it? That's his first response to the abundant harvest – worry! After receiving more than enough, his first thought is about what he does NOT have. “I do not have enough barns.” “What shall I do?” he says, “I have no place to store my crops.”

So... He makes a plan to solve this new problem – he's going to put some effort into building more barns to store this harvest. And he tells himself that **then** he'll be able to sleep well at night. When he's got the new barns, then he'll finally be able to relax at night, eat and drink and celebrate the good things in life.

Whoah. The man is his own source of worry and stress. The land produces abundantly – the story is clear that the good harvest is not because he's such an amazing farmer, or that he worked extra hard for that harvest... the good crop was a gift of the land. But his first thoughts were of 'NOT enough'.

Maybe this story is not about having an abundant harvest, or even about storing some of it away in barns – but about not knowing when to say, “Enough!”

Before starting on this parable, Jesus says to a man: “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of

possessions”. We call it greed; but the word has a broad range of meaning, including something like *insatiable*, unquenchable. Beware of the tendency to always need ‘a little bit more’. Beware of a thirst that is never quenched.

I know that ‘not enough’ fever. Somehow, getting a little makes me want more. I get a bike, and now I want all the ‘accessories’ for my bike. I get some nice pottery serving dishes, and suddenly I’m aware that I don’t have a pottery bowl exactly the right size for this meal. Perhaps I should go out and complete my set. I buy an outfit and suddenly notice the gap in my jewelry. Now I need new earrings, a new necklace, new shoes. Kendall and I buy a car, and at first it’s perfect, but then I realize that it doesn’t have enough horsepower to pull a trailer, doesn’t have a hitch, and doesn’t have a good place to put my coffee cup. Next time we get a car, we’re going to need a little bit more. Are you recognizing the pattern?

There was a simple economic study done in Canada several years ago that crossed all income brackets. The questions were basic: How much is your income? How much would you need to have ‘enough’? Across the board, people’s answers to the second question averaged out to about 10% more. People needed 10% **more** to have enough. If they earned \$500 a month, another \$50 would help them get by. If they earned \$5000, another \$500 more each month would give them the freedom to meet all their financial goals. And so on...

The point is; in this common general mindset, there’s never enough! We’re always sitting at just-under full, longing for that extra 10%. Commercials feed on that need; they create it. Our consumer culture takes note of our desires, they make us notice what we DON’T have, what’s not enough, and make us crave that little bit more. And when we crave it strongly enough, our desire becomes a need.

And I am struck by that number, 10%. Because in God’s economy, we are called to give away a tithe; the first 10% of our earnings. In God’s economy, we always have 10% MORE than we need. As I understand the math, the tithe isn’t a guilt-induced burden, but a confession of gratitude and joy that when God provides, in God’s math, we have more than we need. But it’s a crazy upside-down equation! It goes against everything we hear on TV. It goes against the very grain of our capitalist society, which tells us that each generation needs to acquire more than the previous generation, and that

success and security is measured by the quantity of our possessions. God's economy stands in direct opposition to the culture of commercials that get us to want 10% more. No! We have more than enough already. In fact we have got 10% more than we need, by God's calculations...

Personally, I have experienced the gift of the tithe differently at different income levels. In the next few weeks, we'll hear stories from this congregation about how generous giving is related to a rich and abundant life; how God provides. When I was a Voluntary Service worker in Saint Paul MN, I earned \$40 a month in disposable income. Each week I would put a dollar in the plate, and, it felt wonderful to be able to give. I remembered that I was well supported by the church community. When I was working part-time downtown Toronto, I was earning \$900 a month. I put in my \$90/month tithe, and although each month it seemed like a risk, I was always surprised at the many ways that I was provided for each month. And emotionally, I felt secure. I think that because I gave away 10% of my income and still was provided for, I knew deep inside that I had enough. And as my income has gone up (and down again), the discipline of tithing has reminded me again and again, that I have more than enough. I am not the source of my own security; God is my security. God is ultimately the one who cares for me, who provides for me. And when I pay attention to that, truly, I can set aside my worry and anxiety; I can rest at night; I can eat & drink and celebrate the good things in life right, knowing that I am secure.

And that's what the rich man in our story is not able to do – he is not able to relax, be at rest and enjoy life. The part in the parable about relaxing, eating, drinking, celebrating the good things in life - that's what the rich fool is putting off! He needs to build those barns first before he can get around to relaxing.

And that's where God comes in with the reality check – Fool! Tonight you're going to pass on to the next life; and your last thoughts will be of worry and stress? Your dying thought will be of worry over building a barn to hold more grain than you could possibly need?

I think that it's important to recognize that this parable is directed at towards the rich. The rich have a particular problem with stress and worry, and they are particularly prone to forgetting that God is their provider and their security. Luke's gospel is full of

money-talk, urging the rich towards generosity in the upside-down kingdom of God. I think that the poor who heard this parable would have gotten the point right away – how crazy for that rich food to be worried about yet another barn.... Doesn't he know that he already has it good? How come he can't sleep well? He has more than enough... Fool!

“So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God”. They die stressed out. They die worried. They may have set aside much wealth for themselves, but they have not been able to relax. They have not been able to rest. They have been rich in things, but not rich in soul. Fools. Fools do not see what is before them.

That's a new angle on the story for me. I've generally heard the line “Relax, eat, drink, be merry” as pointing towards the sinful path. Those who do such things are gluttons and greedy fools. They do not think of others, nor do they think of the future. But this parable itself does not make this judgment, not entirely. There is some dismay that the Rich fool was blind to his present abundance and so consumed by his worry, so that he even postponed the time when his spirit could relax, eat, drink and celebrate life.

So then, this is not a story about the evils of possessions, or about the evil of saving for the future. The Greek word ‘Agatha’ , here generally translated as ‘possessions’ or ‘goods’ has the latter meaning. Goods. Good things. Good, beneficial; fertile, sound, prosperous, happy, clearly what is good, goods, property, possessions. This is not a story that should induce guilt over storing some of this abundance for the future, of taking care of ourselves and our retirement, of saving for houses, cars, educations. Not in themselves.

As I am coming to understand the parable, a significant portion of the story is about priorities. When you receive an abundant harvest, is your first thought that you need a bigger barn? When you go to sleep at night, is your mind consumed by what you don't have? Are you caught in the 10% more trap?

In her book – An Overworked America, Juliet Schor presents the astonishing news that over the past twenty years our working hours have increased by the equivalent of one month per year -- a dramatic spurt that has hit everybody: men and women, professionals as well as low-paid workers. She asks a very important question: Why are

we -- unlike every other industrialized Western nation -- repeatedly "choosing" money over time? Is this choice reducing our stress? Is this choice reducing our worry?

Participants in the Affluenza Sunday School class may recognize these next statistics: In the last 30 years our national consumption has gone up by 62 percent, but Americans statistically report that their quality of life has actually *decreased* by 51 % in that same period of time. Statistically, we are no happier now than then, and our quality of life has actually decreased! Our urge for more has failed to provide us with a sense of fulfillment. Our consumer impulse has tricked us into gorging on material things while we suffer from increased social, psychological, and spiritual hungers. Joe Dominguez, whose book is entitled "Your Money or Your Life" writes: "The foolish person wants more money and more of the things money can buy. The wise person wants enough money, and more of the things money *can't* buy: health, happiness, love, and peace of mind."

Worry and 'stuff' go together. We strive for things, we work hard, and we end up with more stuff and less time. We are busier than we have ever been, we're more stressed than ever, and most of us don't know how to begin to get back to a level of sanity in our schedules.

In the passage which follows the rich fool parable, my beloved 'lilies' passage, Jesus says 'do not keep worrying... don't keep striving for these things...for it is the nations of the world that strive after these things and your Father knows that you need them.'

The key word here is STRIVING. Don't keep striving; stressing, worrying about these things.

Your Father knows that you need them.

My Father knows that I need them.

God knows what I need – food, clothing, shelter. God desires that we be well-cared for. As well cared for as the wildflowers and the wild animals whom God tenderly cares for. We are of more value than the birds.

"Consider the lilies, how they grow, they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the

grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you – you of little faith.”

Do not worry about your life!

“Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest?”

Do not worry! If there’s a message that we in the West need to hear today, it’s that one – don’t worry!

That’s what the ‘breath prayer’ that Judy Martin Godshalk introduced earlier in this service talks about. Making space within our day to recognize that we have more than enough. More than enough stuff. More than enough time. God is caring for you.

Don’t worry! God cares for you.

Don’t worry! Don’t get caught up in the 10% more trap. Don’t get caught up in the consumerist trap which takes your time in exchange for your money, and your money in exchange for things, and leaves you with your hunger not filled and your thirst not quenched.

Don’t worry! Don’t keep striving for things. Don’t keep stressing out.

Instead, says Jesus in Luke 12:31, ‘Seek first the kingdom, and all of these things will be given to you as well.’

AMEN.