

Pastor Daniel Iwinski

1/3/2010

Second Sunday after Christmas

St. Paul's (WELS) Moline, IL

3:1

Luke 12:16-21

Use What You Have Been Gifted

I. *God gifts us great gifts for today and eternity;*

II. *these gifts are to be used and shared, not stored up.*

And [Jesus] told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ' "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

When people woke up yesterday, January second yet another holiday season had ended. Not so for us. As a matter of fact today, January third is only the tenth day of Christmas--and we have two more to go. Yes, we are reminded that as Christians, Christmas is not over. In reality Christmas is never over because Christ who has come will never be apart from us. This is the heart of our celebration today.

This season of Christmas we have received the ultimate gift of God Himself. Today, Jesus' words remind us that this is a gift not to be simply hoarded up or kept but to be used every day of our lives. We are most faithful when we use this gift of God's message and presence with other people.

Today we hear a parable from Jesus. A man--a farmer--had land which produced a good crop and the man had to make a decision on what to do with his harvest. So great was it that his barns could not hold everything. While he had many available options he decided to tear down his existing barns and construct larger ones to hold all his possessions. Why did he do this? He did this for his earthly life. He wanted to be able to say to himself: **"You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."** (verse 19). The first thing that Jesus points out is that this man had an entirely wrong perspective on life: that it is just about what we can see hear, touch and consume.

One great gift of Christmas is that God comes into the world which we know and He proves that there is so much more; indeed, there is an eternal reality which is greater than everything we know now. By knowing this we can live our lives in a fundamentally different way than the world does, and the way the farmer does in the parable.

There is something interesting to note about what Jesus says specifically about the farmer in the parable. Listen carefully. Jesus says plainly **"The ground of a certain rich man produced..."** This might not sound significant but what is Jesus emphasizing? It is not the man nor the man's labor per se that produced a good crop, rather it was the land that produced the good crop. What Jesus is really teaching is that the crop is a result of God's blessing and not just something that man alone could bring about. This is why the heart of the man was so far from God.

Today the world around us believes that somehow it can be "self-made" or "self-sustaining." Not true. Everything needed for life--spiritual and physical is itself a gift from God. When people, such as the farmer fail to recognize this they fail to acknowledge God's presence and gift for life in their lives. Today, by God's grace, the Christmas child shatters this false impression for us. The God who comes to us is the God who meets all of our needs--these are gifts from God and they connect us to Him by showing us our need for Him in all things.

There is another line of direction that Jesus takes. Just as we are connected to God in our need so God connects us to other people too. What does Jesus say? To the foolish and selfish farmer Jesus says: **"you fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"** (verse 20). Jesus is lamenting the fact and chastising the man for not using the gifts that God gave him for the benefit of others. Gifts that go unused are gifts that go wasted.

There are really three parties that the man harmed by his actions. First, the man harmed himself by living very foolishly. He took the gifts from God and used them as a buffer from God so he would not have to depend on God or on anyone else for his daily needs. The second party this man hurt was his neighbors: the other people in his life that his crops could have fed and been a blessing to. Rather than use the gifts from God the man locked them up thus negating their use by others. He wasted the gift from God. Jesus makes very clear the third party sinned against: **"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself who is not rich toward God."** (verse 21). Yes, the man offended and sinned against God--not because God needed the man's crops but because God's gift meant to be a blessing for many was wasted.

So what does all of this mean for us in Christmas in the New Year? Today God reminds us to use what we have. Everything we have can and should be put to use for everyone's benefit. Life in this fallen world is not the end in itself but it is important and we are to use everything for not only our own but other's benefit.

This is Christmas the time when we rejoice that God is with us. God is no less with us today in His Word and in His sacraments than He was in the past. Today we have God, today we have God's gifts, physical and spiritual and we can use them wisely not foolishly.

The foolish farmer in Jesus' parable would have lamented not using his possessions to better use had he reflected on his actions. Are we any different? Yes we are. We have physical possessions and we are to use them--and we do. Today we are reminded that we have an overwhelming amount of spiritual gifts that are ours today.

Today we have the ability to reveal what life is really all about--that there is so much more to life than what we see and touch around us. Today we can give the gift of spiritual life by sharing the good news of Jesus who has come and who has died for all of our sins. Today this message is for everyone--we need not and indeed cannot discriminate: we are to preach this message to the whole world.

Jesus' parable reminds us that time itself is a gift. The man in the parable did understand that the fruit of the land, the rich crops, did not come about in an instant. The crops took a long time to plant, to nurture, to grow and finally to harvest and process. They were so very valuable and that is why he stored them up as a treasure. What the man understood so well in regards to his crops he did not understand about his own life. The man's life was of a limited time. Time itself is a gift from God and it can be used wisely and it can be used foolishly.

Today we have a whole new year ahead of us as individuals and as Christians. As in every year we will have births in our families and extended families and we will have funerals too. When God blesses us with a birth of a child that is an opportunity to use all of our gifts and give that child eternal salvation through baptism. We who are already baptized in Christ and have His Word can use those gifts so that those whom we love are truly prepared to die.

Today, and this year, who in your life needs the gifts God has given to you? Who in your life needs to hear that they are indeed sinners who will die but who can die in the grace of God? We can be sure that the man Jesus spoke about in the parable lamented at how foolishly he used what God had given him. To date I have never met a Christian who felt they had wasted their time witnessing their faith to another person. Yes,

they may be saddened that the message they shared was not immediately received faithfully but to give the Gospel is never without promise and never a waste of time. Today we are reminded that we have no better gift to give than to give the gift of life.

Rejoice that God has given you so much to use, rejoice that there is still time and the ability to reach those who need to hear the message. Rejoice that we have a whole new year ahead of us to use and give everything we have. This is Christmas, this is a new year in God! Amen.