

I wonder if you'd be willing to do something risky today? I think in this world at this time in history, it's time for Christians to risk being brave. It's time for us to think clearly about what Jesus said and did, what he lived and died for and then it's time for us to commit together to shaping our lives around that; to conform our lives to Jesus' call on our lives – as individuals, but also as a community of faith; as siblings in Christ formed into one body by the Holy Spirit.

I'm going to ask us **all** to be brave. I believe God is calling me to be brave but I cannot be brave alone. I need you. We need each other when the time for bravery is at hand. So, if you are willing, please hear me out, take a chance for a few minutes, to trust me, as we listen bravely to our gospel reading assigned for today.

Luke 12: 13-21

¹³ Someone from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

¹⁴ Jesus said to him, “Man, who appointed me as judge or referee between you and your brother?”

¹⁵ Then Jesus said to them, “Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one's life isn't determined by one's possessions, even when someone is very wealthy.” ¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: “A certain **rich man's land** produced a bountiful crop. ¹⁷ He said to himself, What will I do? I have no place to store my harvest! ¹⁸ Then he thought, Here's what I'll do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That's where I'll store all my grain and goods. ¹⁹ I'll say to myself, You have stored up plenty of goods, enough for several years. Take it easy! Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself. ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself?’ ²¹ This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren't rich toward God.” Word of God. Word of Life.

It doesn't take much bravery to hear those words from Jesus as telling us to give more to the church. It doesn't require bravery to hear that we need to declutter our house or even give more to the poor. We don't have to be brave to increase our tithe or take our extra clothing to Goodwill. It doesn't demand much of us to remember that “we can't take it with us” when we die. That's how this parable has been heard by generations of the faithful. They were doing their best. But, that's not **our** best. Their times are not our times. The demands of the gospel today require us to be faithful to what Jesus is calling us to **today!**

It takes a brave heart to hear Jesus saying, **Greed is idolatry**. All forms of greed are idolatry. We cannot be ‘rich toward God’ and participate in idolatry. Idolatry is deadly. “The tragic tale of the Rich Fool isn't a reminder that we might die sooner than we hoped or that we might find ourselves wishing that we had spent more time at the kids' basketball games and less at the office, although it doesn't hurt to think about those things from time to time. This parable digs deeper. It tells about money's ability to **impoverish our soul** and rewire our values.”¹ It tells about the ability for **anything** that has become an idol to impoverish our souls and derail our faithful intentions.

The key to Jesus' message in this parable is the last two verses: "But God said to him, 'Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself?' ²¹ This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren't rich toward God."

"This is the way it will be for those who are not rich toward God." Jesus is referring to the first commandment, the commandment that is the basis of all the other commandments: 'I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods besides me.' Ex. 20:2

We cannot be 'rich toward God' when we are chasing other gods; and anything that becomes a guiding force in our lives and in our behavior is a god. It is an idol. Anything that becomes the focus of our time, or our money, or our attention or our health other than God is an idol. None of those things is inherently wrong in and of themselves. All of us must give of our time to many good things; we must give of our money, and our attention and we even give our health to many things that don't become idols. But, when they demand our allegiance; when they pull us away from God; when they drive our behavior and shape our attitudes and determine our relationships then they become a god besides God; then they have become an idol.

When we're chasing other gods we become slaves to them. They begin to own us, whether it's possessions that begin to possess us or it's our deeply held beliefs that blind us to the humanity and right to life and liberty of other people. God did not set the Israelites free from the bondage in Egypt to become slaves again. Jesus did not die so that we would live as slaves to our possessions or to our fears.

Will you be brave with me and look at the idols that seem to be luring us into slavery today?

Could the fact that one in 11 Americans pay to store their excess stuff in storage units be a form of idolatry? Paying to store more than we can fit in our homes feeds the idol of consumerism not the Triune God who needs nothing from us.

Could Christians turning a blind eye to the genocide that Israel is carrying out against the Palestinian people because we fear being called anti-semitic be a form of idolatry? Allowing a whole group of people to be systematically eliminated feeds the idol of fear: we don't want to be seen as anything like the Nazis who murdered 6 million Jews in WWII so now we allow Israel to do whatever it wants in the name of national security.

Could reading the Bible literally using it to further ideological agendas be idolatry? Whether it's a literal reading that denounces LGBTQ people's right to be seen as created in God's image or a reading that limits women's right to be treated as fully equal in life and in church leadership or a reading of Scripture that justifies abuse of creation; could reading the Bible literally be treating it as an idol thereby abusing of the gift God's inspired word?

Could it be idolatry to place our own comfort, our own desires and convenience above the existence of future generations? Could it be idolatry to refuse to act to limit climate change even though countless people are already being driven to higher ground due to rising oceans? Is it idolatry to consider it an **acceptable** loss that species are becoming extinct at an unprecedented

rate; that deforestation is underway in the Amazon to make room for cattle that will be exported to feed fast food hamburger lovers in the U.S.?

Could it be idolatry that allows elected officials to use fear to pit us against one another? Is it idolatry, that allows fear to justify refusing aid and safety to desperate, vulnerable people fleeing violence around the world?

Could it be idolatry that allows African Americans to face greater poverty, incarceration and violent death at a far greater rate than white Americans?

Could it be idolatry that leads us to place individual gun rights over the cost of 281 lives lost in 2019 alone; 281 lives lost in mass shootings in the United States **this year** and another 1025 people wounded in 252 shootings in 216 days. That's 1.2 shootings per day because of the idolatry that sacrifices human life on the altar of reckless, individual freedom. Is it idolatry that causes us as a society to accept that loss of life for the sake of individual's rights to own a weapon that has the ability to kill 9 people in a minute as happened this morning in Ohio?

We have to bravely ask, is it idolatry when the populations of ten nations possess 79 percent of the world's total wealth even though they constitute only 29 percent of the world's total population?

And we must ask, what is sacrificed on each of those altars for the sake of our idols being maintained? **It's our children. It's future generations** who are being sacrificed. Their lives are being offered as sacrifice to appease the gods of greed, of fear, of apathy and of self-centeredness.

And that is the story of the rich fool who did not notice that he did **nothing** to cause his crops to grow so abundantly. He did not create the dirt or the water or the sunshine. He doesn't seem to notice that he is talking to himself. Does he have no one else to talk to? Has he sacrificed his relationships on the altar of success?

I told you we'd have to be brave to look squarely at what Jesus is asking of us.

I told you I need you to be brave. I'm no better at this than anyone. Humans are very good at being blind to our own idols.

Jesus didn't live and die a brutal death so that we would quibble about whether a tithe is literally 10% or whether that needs to be counted on the gross or our net income. Jesus didn't die so that we would give our extra coats to the clothing bank or judge each other for the size of our houses.

Jesus lived and died to create a **new** way of living beginning here and now among us and extending into eternity: a way of living that creates community that is brave together; that lives in bonds of mutual respect uplifting the humanity of **every** person, no exceptions; community that uplifts the worth of all of **creation** of which humanity is only a part; creation which is dearly loved by God just as humans are. Community that sees no one as 'someone else's child'; sees no one as unworthy of our care and help; sees no one as less valuable than anyone's right to own a weapon capable of mass murder.

But our need for bravery goes beyond **naming** these idols.

The next brave act is for us to talk to each other respectfully, regardless of our viewpoint, to listen in love with those with whom we disagree as they listen to us, listening not for ways to prove each other wrong, but listening for ways we respect each other, ways we really value the **same** things; listening for common ground on which to build a common life. Because our world desperately needs us to be brave. We cannot go on like this. The hate, the fear the demonizing, the killing must stop. We must find our way into relationship with each other and with all of humanity and all of creation. **Our lives depend upon it. Our children's lives depend upon it. Creation depends upon it.**

We can choose to be fools, ignoring our idols and blindly go on building bigger barns. Or we can, together work to become rich toward God asking the Holy Spirit to lead us and transform us into the kingdom of God for which we pray for the sake of our lives here and now and for the kingdom of God through eternity. Amen.

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