

Luke 12:13-21

The Rich Fool was no fool in his own mind. To his way of thinking, he was one of the wisest men of his day. Others did not have the wealth he enjoyed. Others did not have the delightful problem he faced—of having to build bigger barns. No, in his mind, he was wise and shrewd; it was other people that were the fools.

And the world would agree. The world's standard, then and today, for judging whether one is a fool or not has everything to do with success, money, and fame. After he died, his obituary would not have read: "Rich Fool Dies," but rather "Jewish Community Loses a Great Man!"

The problem with this parable is that we may think we do not relate to it. We're not rich fools because we're not rich! So when we hear these words of Jesus, we tend to point our finger at people like Michael Vick, Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan, and Paris Hilton, but not at ourselves. And yet, the man was a fool not because of his riches, but because of the place riches occupied in his life.

If you don't think you're rich then take a trip to Southern Sudan and compare your lifestyle with the people there. For many of them, one dollar is more money than they will make in a year. And if you and I don't think we're fools, then let's stop comparing ourselves to the Michael Vick's, and the Paris Hilton's, and the Lindsay Lohan's, and let's rather compare ourselves to the Christians who were willing to give up everything, including their own life, for the sake of Jesus Christ and His Gospel.

Jesus did not occupy the Rich Fool's life. I'm going to read the words he speaks to himself and I want you to count the number of times you hear the pronouns "I" and "my:" "What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?" And he said, "This is what I will do; I will tear 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 many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" (Luke 12:17-19)

Did you count up to eleven? Eleven times the man speaks the words "I" and "my." Not once did he speak of thanking God. Not once did he think of serving God and others with what God had given him. What occupied the Rich Fool's life? His money, yes, but really—he did; he was full of himself. Yes, he was a "rich" fool, but even if he had had no riches he would have been a fool because he was wise in his own mind. He may have acknowledged God. Being a Jew, he would have said that he believed in God. But God and His Word were not a part of his life. He stored up things for himself, Jesus says, but he was not rich toward God.

Now it's not my purpose today to make you feel guilty if you are well-to-do. That's not the point of the parable. The point Jesus makes is this...your life does not consist of your possessions; it consists of Jesus Christ and what He has done for you and gives to you. A person does not have one bit more of life when he has a bit more money and success. And a person does not have one bit less of life if he has less of these things. The Rich Fool had much, but that night he died. His wealth did not give him life and it could not keep him alive. But when you have Christ you have everything, for not even death can take Christ from us.

This man was a fool because even his wisest plans left God out of the picture. He was going to enjoy his retirement, but he neglected to consider what God had in mind for him. He planned for many years of happiness, but God determined that he would die. The Rich Fool was going to eat, drink, and be merry, but others would now be merry at his expense—they would eat and drink everything he had gathered for himself.

It's important for us to confess that the Rich Fool lives within each of us. Open your pantry, your refrigerator. Look at your savings account, your retirement funds. All of us carefully plan for success day after day, year after year. It's what we do whether we're Christians or not. We make sure that there is enough food for tomorrow; that there is enough money to take a vacation; and we put some, or perhaps much, towards our retirement because we also want to eat, drink, and be merry for many years to come.

What? Are we planning on just getting by? No! We want to enjoy life to the fullest. Our minds are occupied, therefore, with our job, with making money, with saving money, with our future. We are, as Jesus says of the Rich Fool, people who store up things for ourselves—not that this is necessarily wrong—it's what we do as human beings. But...are we rich toward God? Well, let's see...do we read our Bible daily? Do we look forward to hearing God's Word regularly here in His House? Do we hunger for Christ's body and blood here at His altar? Or do we fit the things of God into our schedule only when it's convenient for us?

The Rich Fool was a fool because his life was out of balance—he desired God's temporal blessings much more than he desired God's spiritual blessings. And aren't we "rich fools" because we're so busy and occupied with living life and planning for life, that we neglect the one thing life consists of—Jesus Christ and His Word of Life for us?

But, of course, you can't tell a fool anything, can you; because a fool is wise in his own mind. Such was the case with the man in our text. He died thinking he was wise. But God called him a fool. He planned for this life but not for the life to come.

Better to be called a fool by the world than by God. The world may say it's foolish to give ten percent of both your time and money to God; that it's foolish to be in His Word daily and to hear His Word weekly; that it's foolish to serve Him with your time, treasures, and talents. But God's wisdom is, as the Apostle says, foolishness to the world. And God's wisdom was to become flesh and blood for our sake. Because we're such fools, God became "foolish" for us and chose to die our death on the cross. Because you and I are so occupied with living life, Jesus gave up His life for you so that you now have life to the fullest in Him. Because we're so concerned with what we will eat and drink, Jesus comes to be for you the Bread of Life so that you have eternal life through Him.

In Christ Jesus God does not call you a fool. He calls you His forgiven child—baptized into Christ; sustained by His Word and Sacrament—God is rich toward you, giving you everything you need for this life and for the life to come. Consider how foolish God was in sending His Son into our world, and then for delivering Him into the hands of murderers so that everything Jesus accomplished came to an "end" with His death. And now, who will get what Jesus prepared? You will. When the Rich Fool died, his relatives received everything that was his. And so, because Jesus died for you, you receive

everything—forgiveness, life forever, peace with God, joy eternally...it's all yours in Christ, for in His wisdom He chose to become foolish for you giving you what was His by His suffering, death, and resurrection.

You and I may have lived, even up to this point in our life, more like the Rich Fool than like a child of God—but friend, God forgives you. He is not angry with you. Jesus' blood covers over all your wrongs. God does not call you a fool. He calls you forgiven in Christ. And because you're forgiven you can live in His forgiveness. In His Word He declares peace with you, and so you can hear, read, and study that Word often. At His Table He gives you full assurance of faith, and so you can come often to His Holy Meal.

One day you and I, like the Rich Fool, will die. And then who will get what was ours? If ours is Christ and Christ is ours, then our children and their children will have the same blessings in Christ that we have. They will reap the rewards that come when father and mother do not just plan for this life, but when they are rich toward God and live their life in Christ.

You are not fools, or you would not be here today in God's House. You are His forgiven ones in Christ. No matter how rich or poor you may be, because Christ is here for you with His gifts of salvation, you are rich toward God because here in His Word are all of His riches for you. Amen.