

“Foolish Riches Give Foolish Faith”

Luke 12:13-21

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Play stupid games, win stupid prizes?” Well, the idea behind that is you treat something as if the outcome is within your control and you have determined it to be a good outcome despite the insanity of the action you are performing. There are those who handle rattlesnakes, wrestle alligators, dive off cliffs into shallow water, swim with sharks, and the list goes on. Many who engage in such risky activities wind up injured, or even dead for such tomfoolery. But what these all have in common is that the danger is real, and it is ignored by those who are engaging in such acts. They have willingly agreed to throw away their lives for the sake of a momentary rush of adrenaline which could very likely be their last. It’s not surprising when we think of this in the context of our Gospel lesson this morning that they are placing their personal gratification over the value of their God-given life. Just like those who “play stupid games and win stupid prizes,” those who amass and put their faith in foolish riches in this life, attain a foolish faith which cannot save.

Our text this morning brings us the parable of the rich fool. This man’s crops were producing so abundantly that he had nowhere to store them when they were harvested. His barns were simply too small to hold the vast amounts. So, what was his answer? The logical one: tear down the barns and build bigger ones so he can store up more for himself. Seems fair, right? After all, he earned the spoils of his work and deserves to keep all of it for himself. He can live contentedly for years to come, relaxing, eating, and drinking to his heart’s content. And so, he tells his soul to kick back and ride the wave of enjoyment as he enjoys his spoils. He has everything he needs or wants, and he can live a full life without fear of lacking.

Enter God, and suddenly the time he believed he had is gone. His soul is demanded of him at that very moment, and it is not prepared for the sudden end. You can almost see the picture in your mind. He’s got his feet kicked up next to his pool having a cocktail or indulging in fine foods thinking he’s got it “made in the shade.” There’s nothing to be afraid of or prepared for because he has everything he needs and more to spare. But now the Almighty stands before him, nullifying the riches he enjoys and has stored up for himself. His unprepared soul must now depart, and what is to become of the riches he has laid up for himself? To where must they go?

We could certainly spend time speaking about the merits of sharing your riches with the church, donating time and moneys to the needy, and the like, for we all have an obligation to support the mission of the church to spread the Gospel. But the real focal point is not in what happens to these riches when the man is gone, or even in what he chooses to do with them while they are his. The focal point of this parable is not stewardship and providing for the needs of the church as many will preach, but it is in the foolish faith of the foolish man. He was living for today, focusing solely on that which was right in front of him instead of that which awaits him in eternity.

Despite the teaching of many preachers, there is no command from the Lord here to not save your money, or a prohibition against preparing provisions for yourself in the event of a disaster (whether monetary or freeze-dried). There is no demand from Jesus to give everything you have over and above your immediate needs to the church. He is not calling for you to make the church wealthy as the heretical prosperity Gospel teaches. We all know our obligation to the church and her mission. We are to provide a percentage of what we earn in our God-given vocations back to the one who has given us that gift. But again, the message being delivered is about the misplaced faith of the man who has kept all of his riches stored up for himself.

He is placing the fate of his soul in the hands of earthly treasures, rather than the treasures that are stored up for him in heaven. And those treasures are not food, drink, or money, but eternal life and salvation. Selfish riches of this life mislead our soul into believing that we are secure and have nothing to fear. But if we truly allow ourselves to slip into a false sense of security then we will be facing an uncertain judgment when our souls are required of us. Our faith must not be in the foolish riches of this world, but in the abundant riches of Christ which are ours through faith. Then, and only then, can our souls rest, relax, and enjoy the spoils of what have been collected for them. Because even now, here in this place, our souls delight in the riches of our loving God.

In the means of grace we receive the Gospel treasures in Word and Sacrament. Through the washing of water and the Spirit, faith is given, and those who believe are given the weapon with which to defeat the devil and his temptations. By the simple means of bread and wine, the very body and blood of our Lord and Savior is truly present here, physically present for us to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of sins and by that forgiveness the strengthening and sustaining of our faith. And through the preaching of the Gospel in its truth and purity, we hear the very words of Christ who has redeemed the world by His blood, whose victorious death on the cross has declared us righteous before our Father in heaven.

Those treasures, the treasures that bring to us eternal life are the ones that should be our focus. Those are the gifts that God gives which truly matter. But that does not mean that we neglect our vocations and fail to provide the needs of this life. Those too are God-given gifts that point us to the true treasures we need. Our vocations are God's means of provision for His people. By being successful in your job, the Lord is providing for you your daily bread. By being a devout wife, He is showing you what it means to be the bride of Christ. In being a loving husband, He is giving us a great picture of the love that Christ has for His Church. In being a caring father or mother, we are given the greatest picture of what our relationship with our Father in heaven truly is. He loves us with a love that is beyond all knowing, and through that love He provides good things for those whom He loves.

When we have abundance of blessings in this life, do not store them up believing that they bring with them some happiness over and above the treasures of God. Understand them for what they are, and they are not things of this world. Only when you elevate them over and above the salvation of your soul do they become things of this world. They are things provided by God, and those things require good stewardship in this life. But only in this life. There is no storehouse for you to keep the things you have and then when you are raised on the last day you'll get to go and raid your barns. The only full barns we will have on the last day are the full barns of Christ's unending love and mercy which is ours for His sake alone.

We will join the throng of those who live in the presence of His holy treasures—in His very eternal presence. We will dwell in the light of the face of God. He will provide for us in a way that we cannot comprehend, because the earthly treasures of this life will be no more, and it will be as the Revelation to the Apostle John says in 21:4, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." We will be in God's perfect bliss—the beatific vision—where nothing but His perfection exists in and through us. We will no longer need the things of this life, so put your faith in the things of God, for they are the things of salvation.

When we put our faith in the things of this world, we lose sight of the truth of God's promise to give us a great inheritance. And that inheritance has nothing to do with the things we acquire in this life. The Lord provides great things for us through our vocations, giving us our daily bread which He taught us to pray for in the Lord's Prayer. To many, He gives great abundance, and to others He gives just enough. But the faith of each receives the same. They receive equal share in the gifts of God, equal share in His forgiveness which belongs to us in Christ Jesus. Faith in Christ is abundance of riches,

because through that faith we receive that which He has gone to prepare for us as He says in John 14.

Faith in foolish riches gives foolish faith. It brings one a false sense of security for which their soul will soon pay the price. To have is not to be forsaken, but to place your soul's security in what you have is for foolish gain. Our faith is in Christ, the one who came to this world to die for all as true God and true man. Our great possession, the only treasure we need, is Jesus. He dwells within each and every one of us by virtue of our baptisms, and by that indwelling we receive our beautiful inheritance. There is nothing foolish in the riches of heaven, and what is laid up for us in heaven is eternal life, and that is the greatest treasure we can have, and the one we receive by great faith in the one who gave all that we might live. Amen