

2019 08 11 – Adding Faith

Luke 12:13-34

When I arrived home from vacation on Friday, I noticed that the field across the road from my home is now stubble. It's obvious that this year's harvest is officially underway. Like the rich man in today's story, Saskatchewan farmers are now surveying their crops and deciding if new grain bins need to be built. Each year you can measure the expected yield in this area by how many new shiny bins are being transported down the highway.

So I want to begin today by saying that there's nothing wrong with buying bigger grain bins so that you can store your crop. In fact, you may remember a story from the book of Genesis where Joseph became the Egyptian pharaoh's right-hand man when he advised the monarch to build huge bins to store food in preparation for seven years of famine. We all know that some years are better than others and it's always good to have a little extra stored away for those leaner years.

In today's story, God didn't call the farmer a fool because he was rich. God called him a fool because the farmer put all his trust and his faith in his possessions. God called him a fool because the farmer said to himself, "You have blessings in reserve for many years to come. Relax! Eat, drink and be merry!" God called him a fool because the rich farmer was focused on what his

money could do for him rather than what he could do for his neighbour. God called him a fool because his wealth had taken his heart.

It's easy to get caught up in the rat race of earning money and storing up wealth. As someone who is nearing the age of retirement, I am very aware that my income will soon disappear and that I need to be saving for my retirement years. When I Googled "How much money should I be saving for retirement?" one website admitted that the standard advice is "as much as you can." This is the kind of message that we hear every day. Constantly we are told that more is better, that we need bigger homes, bigger cars, bigger boats, and bigger bank accounts. Advertising, and social media assure us that more money and more possessions will bring us health and happiness. <http://money.com/money/collection-post/2791164/how-much-income-to-save-for-retirement/>

But Jesus came on this earth to teach humankind a "different way of being." With his story of the rich farmer he reminds us that our focus should not be on "accumulating riches for ourselves" but rather on being "rich in God." So what does it mean to "rich in God?" I guess the answer to that question depends on our understanding of God. I believe in a God that is the essence of love, a God of compassion, understanding, a God of amazing grace. So it makes sense to me that being "rich in God" means focusing on love and relationships rather than money or possessions. . It makes sense to me that being "rich in God" means trusting and having faith in the power of love instead of the power of money and possessions.

In today's story God says to the farmer, "You fool! This very night your life be required of you. To whom will all your accumulated wealth go?" As we've all heard before, "when we die, we can't take it with us!" We are born and we die with in total poverty. Several years ago, author Ralph Milton, sent an email to his regular subscribers, describing birth and death. He wrote:

Three days ago my brother Randy died.

Two months ago, my first grandchild, Jacob, was born.

Those two events need a lot of meditating on. The holiness and the beauty of those moments are only gradually sinking in. I'm sure I will never understand them fully, if at all.

But the Spirit has been speaking.

Jacob came to us in the poverty of birth. He came weak and naked with nothing but his need. But one day, soon after he was born, I lay down on the sofa with him asleep upon my breast. Jacob sound asleep. Grandpa weeping at the wonder of it all.

Like the widow who had only copper coins to give, unconscious of the greatness of her gift, tiny Jacob gave me love and trust and joy that I will treasure all my life.

And my brother too. There on the hospital bed, the morphine shutting down his eyelids, we spoke to each other from the poverty of his dying and the poverty of my grief. I said words to Randy I had never said before in all the wealthy, healthy 60 years we had been brothers.

"I love you Randy!"

And in the pain-racked poverty of his dying, Randy gave me a gift he never could have shared before.

"I love you too," he said.

Blessed are the poor, for they have gifts to give.

Every time we allow ourselves to be vulnerable enough to give and receive love we become “rich in God,” and we get closer to God’s reign of peace and justice on this earth. Every time we allow ourselves to give and receive love we add another jewel to our treasure box. Every time we trust in the power of love we are also trusting in God, the Essence of Love, the Ground of our Being.

I want to finish today by telling you about a Saskatchewan farmer that I met when I was a student minister in Alsask, SK. His name was Robert Thomson, but I knew him as Bud. His wife, Helen, was my educational supervisor and I spent every Wednesday morning at their home during my eight month internship in Marengo Pastoral Charge. Bud and Helen already had four grown children and thirteen grandchildren but they lovingly adopted every student minister that came along. I was no exception.

During my recent vacation, I had the opportunity to visit Helen. I hadn’t seen her for several years. Helen and I had a wonderful visit and before I left she gave me a copy of the eulogy that their daughter-in-law, Sharon, had prepared for Bud’s funeral. I knew that Bud had died in December 2016; but his funeral took place during the Christmas season and I was unable to be there. Sharon’s eulogy began with the following words:

Whether you knew him as Robert or R.J. Thomson, you probably liked him and respected him. BUT, if you knew him as Bob, Bud, Dad, Grandpa, Papa, or Uncle Fud then you LOVED him! Who could have guessed that when his father started calling him “Buddy” 85 years ago, that Dad would

become one to Everyone! Dad was a Human Magnet; people just seemed to gravitate to him. It didn't matter if you were 1 or 100 years old, Dad had that presence that would automatically put you at ease and the ability to make you feel safe.

Yes, we all loved Bud but he loved us first. Bud was a kind and gentle man who shared his whole self with his family, his community, his church and even with people he didn't know. Bud was not a rich man. He and Helen lived in a humble home and managed a modest farm. But Bud was definitely "rich in God." He had a deep trust in the power of love and a treasure box overflowing with loving relationships.

"For wherever your treasure is,
that's where your heart will be."
(Luke 12:34)