

The Story of the Rich Fool: Three verbs
The Rev. Dr. Martha Tucker
August 3, 2019

Blessed be God who animates our lives and leads us toward the glory of things heavenly! AMEN

Evelyn Underhill, the great Anglican mystic, says there are too many who mostly spend their lives conjugating three verbs: to want /to have/ and to do. Craving, clutching and fussing...we are kept in perpetual unrest” The good news of Jesus Christ is otherwise!

While we know at some faith level, that nothing can separate us from the love of God, we also live our lives too often consumed by these three verbs or their synonyms which lead us to places where discovering God, exercising our fullest spiritualities, and responding with love to God neighbor and self become at best obscured.

The antidote if you will to these three God blocking verbs is found in Scripture in many places and might be best captured in Micah with three other grammatical parallels: to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

It is in those three verb phrases that we discover God and truth and salvation. It is in those verb phrases that we lose our egoistic selves in favor of our giving, generous selves. It is in those verb phrases that we are surprised by JOY!

And so today I believe that these contrasting verb sets which are really contrasting rules of life underlie the parable of the Rich Fool informed as it is by the lectionary.

As Jesus often does, extreme even ridiculous stories can create confusing responses. But this parable, much like the parable of the rich young man instructed to sell all he owns, not only places the burden or responsibility on the farmer, which is us, but it also makes it clear that Jesus/ God are not estate planners or probate lawyers “who am I to divide etc..”

Rather ours is a God of abundance who creates and offers all without discrimination to his sacred creation and then asks us to respond accordingly, to God’s will, within the commandments of loving God, self and neighbor, with the mind of Christ.

And so this as well as other parables place Fool in contrast to Wise One and Earth in contrast to Heaven and Material Goods in contrast to Treasure.

In simplest terms Thou shalt not hoard! Thou shalt not expand thy walls and barns and houses to accommodate more stuff!

In simplest terms thou shalt recognize in God’s economy what is enough! Thou shalt treasure, which means cherish, those things heavenly, which means spiritual. Thou shalt offer all to the glory of God.

All this is to say that in this parable we learn something yet again about HOW to live this CHristian life: How to live in this world and not be of this world

HOW do we get from I to we

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How do we get from mine to ours
How do we get from earthly goods to Heavenly treasure

And we know from Colossians, as well as so many of Paul's letters that we do this by remaining faithful, deepening our faith, and living into our baptismal covenant: after all the covenant is simply a rephrasing of loving, being merciful and doing that which is just!

We have been baptized into the Body of Christ; we are to inhabit the mind of Christ!

This is hard to do! We hedge our bets, we rationalize.

And not only is it hard but at its extreme we might be confused with some of the artifacts and valuables which have meaning. we have spent many years allowing our filter to be clogged with stuff instead of cleaning it or getting a new one.

Therein lies the Christian filter: meaning, treasure, cherish are all words which have sacramental significance. Sacramental significance treasures underlying grace. It signifies invisible worth, sacred divine worth, like bread and wine, like a chalice, like a letter, like a memory.

Jesus is warning the farmer about material goods which only feed greed not the soul.

Again, the mind of Christ, the persistence of grace.

Perhaps a story demonstrates this better than I can explain: There once was a man who knew the danger of greed for things so he believed that he was doing the right and moral thing to focus instead on possessing his thoughts, to his uniqueness.

So he developed a mantra: when thinking his thoughts he would repeat MINE MINE MINE!

After several days of repeating this mantra and feeling quite proud of having found an aspect of life which he could control, he confidently said MINE MINE MINE and heard a voice respond saying MINE TOO

Wait what was that?

He decided to repeat MINE>>>MINE>>>MINE more slowly and deliberately

Upon finishing he heard again MINE TOO

Someone was trespassing on his own thoughts!

He wanted this trespasser gone!

So he practically screamed MINE MINE MINE

There he thought in a moment of silence and just as relief hit he heard the annoying refrain MINE TOO!

He left his meditation spot and proceeded on his day

In fact for several days he stopped the three part mantra but one day having not heard the strange voice at all he took up his chant again: MINE MINE MINE but very tentatively!

MINE TOO! came and he was simply undone...

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Confused, dejected he realized that nothing felt right anymore, his old litany gave him no comfort So he decided he would be ready next time and almost silently offered MINE MINE MINE

When MINE TOO came, he asked YOURS? with a sense of defeat and surrender
A moment later came OURS!

there is was a thought he had never even considered
he rolled it around in his head and said OURS OURS OURS

It felt good and right and warm and welcoming

So now when he would pray OURS OURS OURS there was no retort, only blessed silence

AHH the ego causes us to do foolish things

Fool as used in the bible means someone who does not worship God, someone who foolishly worship idols like our farmer...

The opposite of the fool is the wise one whose perfect freedom lies not in accumulation of stuff but in surrender and service to the one true living God.

Too much stuff blinds us and deafens us to the word of God, to the will of God.

When we simplify and reorient and reframe we ,like the originally egoistic seeke,r are filled with the persistent insistent divine WE

Give Us this day

Lead Us

Deliver Us

every day we might think of the words of Micah and examine our lives for mercy love and justice instead of taking stock or inventory of goods

every day we might ask if we are worshipping in the beauty of holiness not just on Sunday but finding cultivating an asethetic of beauty and intrinsic worth and meaning

I invite you to try on the verbs of Micah, and to cast away the verbs of greed

I invite you to adopt a mantra of ours ours ours

And in the silence which follows know that you are being pursued by a God who desires and loves you and will not let you go...period.That persistence will always invade mine mine mine.