



**St. Anne's Episcopal Parish**  
**Church Circle • Annapolis, MD • 21401**

Parish Offices & Education Building  
 Location at 199 Duke of Gloucester St.  
 Annapolis, MD 21401

Phone : 410-267-9333  
 Fax 410-280-3181  
[www.stannes-annapolis.org](http://www.stannes-annapolis.org)

Amy Richter

Proper 13C: Luke 12:13-21; Colossians 3:1-11 and following

St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Annapolis, MD, August 1, 2010

*Poor Fool*

Perhaps you have received an email something like I have:

“Dear Winner, Congratulations!! You are a winner of our BRITISH TELECOMS GLOBAL LOTTERY PROGRAM that was held on the 5th of January 2010. Due to a mix up of email address, the results have finally been released. You have been approved for a payout of 1.5 million pounds. All we need is your checking account number so that we can release your winning prize to you. Don't delay. Act now.”

I've also received offers to help Nigerian princes distribute millions of dollars to charity, and to serve as the financial guardian of the heir of a wealthy cocoa merchant. The only thing these people need is to know where they can send the money.

In today's gospel lesson Jesus tells the story often called the parable of the Rich Fool. But Jesus doesn't call it that. Jesus begins the story, not with talk about the man, but about the land and its bounty. “The *land* of a rich man produced abundantly.” What impresses Jesus is the amazing barn-bursting bounty of the land. A gift.

But the man sees the gift he has received as a problem. He is the beneficiary of a harvest so huge he has nowhere to store all the grain. His first thought is, “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?” He has missed the blessing. He sees it only as a burden. He has received a miraculous gift, and his response is to worry: How should I manage my miracle?

“I know.” The man is resourceful, a problem solver. “I will do this: I will pull 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 ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’” The harvest is so great that he doesn’t just build an additional barn. He can afford to build all new ones – bigger, brand new barns. This is his plan, his way of wisely providing for himself and ensuring his future. I know what I will do.

Notice that all the talk in the story so far has been a monologue, and a pretty self-centered one at that. “*I* will pull down *my* barns and build bigger ones, and there *I* will store all *my* grain and *my* goods. And *I* will say to *my* soul, ‘Soul’ . . .” The man consults with no one else. He talks only to himself and listens only to himself. He congratulates himself and celebrates himself. He plans for himself and his future. A future where he can say, there, now I have enough. He won’t go on like this forever, feverishly tearing down and rebuilding barns. Someday when he has counted all his bushels of grain, finished all his hard work, he will say: ahhh . . . Enough.

Do we really believe this man with the superabundant land will let the next harvest go to seed? Should he, when he is the steward of such fertile land and so many people are hungry?

A voice interrupts the man’s monologue. The voice is God’s. And God calls him, “Fool.”

“You fool!” says God. “This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” Fool.

There is a psalm that describes a fool. Psalm 14:1 says, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” There is just me, myself, mine, and my management of my achievements. There is no gift: no security, future, family, food as a gift. It’s all mine, to be managed for me. There is no transcendent, external, higher claim made upon me and my possessions other than my own comfort, contentment and pleasure. There is no connection between my resources and my responsibilities. “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”<sup>1</sup>

In the end, the man’s fortunes and plans will fail. His life, which in the end is not his own, will be demanded of him. And what will all his goods do for him then?

---

<sup>1</sup> William Willimon, in a sermon “Managing our Miracles.”

Please don't let the intrusion of death into the story throw you off track. Death isn't the point here; but we know that the presence of death brings one face to face with what is truly important, what truly deserves attention, devotion, and time. We know how death can point out the wide and tragic gap between the answers to the questions, "What is really important?" and "How do I spend my time?" Between, "What is God doing in my life? What has God done for me? What gifts have I been given?" and "How do I respond?" Jesus' point is not about the very real fact that we will all face death at some unknowable point in the future. Jesus is talking about how we are to live – right now -- as well as the state of our soul after we die. Jesus came that we might have abundant life – now and for all eternity.

So Jesus says, "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Guard against all kinds of greed. Here's Jesus' word even to those of us who think we will never face the rich man's dilemma of how to manage overabundance: Guard against all kinds of greed. Greed is any insatiable desire. What possession threatens to possess you? Money? Your job? Your family? Home? Reputation?

Annie Dillard tells the story of two different polar expeditions, each exercising a greed of a different kind. In 1845, the Franklin Expedition set out for the North Pole with 138 men. They carried a 1200 volume library, a hand organ playing fifty tunes, china place settings, cutglass wine goblets, sterling silver flatware, and wearing the dress uniforms of Her Majesty's Navy. They all died. Their corpses were found with pieces of backgammon board and a great deal of table silver engraved with officers' initials and family crests.

Another explorer, Sir Robert Falcon, had a greed for purity and self-sufficiency. He thought the only proper way to reach the pole was to go unaided by dogs or companions. He died too. Some of the most moving documents of adventure writing, expressing his lofty sentiments, his dignity and self-control were found under his frozen carcass.<sup>2</sup>

Whether we're making our way through the expedition of this life storing up an abundance of sterling silver flatware or an abundance of self-sufficiency, a voice intrudes into our false security and says sadly, "Fool."

---

<sup>2</sup> In Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*.

“So it is,” says Jesus, “with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

There is another way. Be rich toward God. How is that?

In the passage immediately following what we heard this morning from Colossians, is St. Paul’s wisdom about being rich toward God. He writes, “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. . . Above all, clothe yourselves with love . . . And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were called in one body. And be thankful. . . And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

The rich fool is clothed in fine garments. When we are rich toward God we will clothe ourselves with the finest garments: compassion, kindness, meekness, patience, love. These garments never fade, never wear out, or fall out of fashion.

The rich fool believes he is alone. Those rich toward God know that we are never alone, we are bound together in one body.

The rich fool thinks he is the ruler of all his possessions. The rich toward God let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts.

The rich fool overlooks the gift, sees God’s blessings only as burdens or the fruits of his own labor. The rich toward God give thanks to God always, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

These riches are within our reach. God is offering them to us even now. This is the best get rich opportunity ever. Don’t delay. Act now.