

# Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

## GOD'S FOOLS

Luke 12:13-21

### Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost Analysis by Ron Starenko

13Someone in the crowd said to (Jesus), "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be judge or arbitrator over you?" 15And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." 16Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' 18Then he said, '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. 19And I will say to my soul, , 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' 20But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be? 21So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.'"

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#### DIAGNOSIS: "You fool!" (v. 20)

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : "... (walking) in darkness" (Eccl. 2:14)

Everyone knows that it is foolish, to say the least, not to take

care how we manage our financial affairs. Furthermore, there are brokers, analysts available everywhere to help us succeed. We take that for granted. While we might not ever “strike it rich,” as we like to say, yet we would all agree that it makes good sense to be careful about preserving our wealth, whatever the amount, like my parents did, struggling during the Great Depression, in order to survive. We applaud those who know how to prepare for the future. We call it wisdom. The Preacher, the author of the book of Ecclesiastes, calls it blundering on in the darkness.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Gutted by Greed***

Who, then, would ever pause to consider the danger hidden in our planning and calculating, the consequences of investing in ourselves, when mere survival needs become frantic greed? Becoming rich toward self, which is what greed is, we not only suffer from ever wanting more, in a panic, when we suffer from the fear of losing what we want to keep. The wise prophet who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes, sometimes referred to as the “Preacher,” calls this illusion-making “vanity,” “a chasing after wind” (v. 12), a loss of substance, a life without meaning. Here is the image of the self, at once a thing to be served, flaunted, and worshipped, eventually becoming something to be despised. Though we were created “to eat and drink and find enjoyment in [our] toil” (v. 24), the Preacher observed, we end up hating our toil in which we had toiled under the sun, seeing that we must leave it to those who come after us, and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish, even whether we have been wise or foolish when we are dead and gone?

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Suffering the Payoff***

“You fool!,” to quote Jesus, with these further words from the parable: “This very night your life is being demanded of you” (v. 20). What a come-down, what an end, to have had so much and then end up with so little, with nothing, disinherited! What a

tragedy, as Jesus said, not to be “rich toward God!” No matter what we own, we end up “holding the bag,” looking into the emptiness, cursing ourselves, smacking our foreheads, screaming, “You fool!”

## **PROGNOSIS: “You Fool!” (v. 20)**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) :** *God’s Fool, a “Friend” in the Darkness (v. 14)*

More than once, Satan screamed at Jesus, “You fool!,” attempting to convince Jesus to give up his foolish notions all the way to the cross (Matt. 4:1-11; 16:21-23) about saving us, believing that he already had us in his pocket. “Why, Jesus? You could have had everything. It was all there for the taking. Everyone knows that only a fool would gamble away what he already had, believing that the world, not you, would have “treasures” (v. 21) galore. A fool! Why would you be so foolish as to take the chance of losing what you already have? Why waste your time, your life, on those who are more my friend than yours. Look at them! They want you only on their terms. When you die, they will call you a fool.” And, yes, they did, as the world always has, as we too do. Still, he would be the fool for all fools, suffering away our fatal foolishness, then coming back, calling us Brother and Friend, sharing with us “the family inheritance” (v. 13). As it turns out, this friend becomes the fool, God’s Fool. In that gracious transaction the devil is fooled and foiled and we are found to be as alive and free as Jesus, the One who was raised from death, now God’s fools, God’s friends forever.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *And Wise, Like Those “who have eyes in their head” (v. 14)*

According to the world’s way of measuring what is wisdom, we are fools, living with a wisdom that St. Paul called “God’s foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:25), having received by the power of the

Spirit, communicated in our baptism, the Supper, the word preached, the community gathered, the wisdom of God, along with “righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (v. 30), shorthand for the good news, the gifts that give us the ability to see through the works of “sin, death, and the devil” (Martin Luther) and behold the Fool, our Lord Jesus Christ, holding on to us, God’s treasures. No wonder Christians enjoy such “foolishness,” as they respond to the call to “eat, drink, and be merry” (v. 19).

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Rich toward Our Neighbor***

Furthermore, when we are “rich toward God,” we are also rich toward our neighbor. Not caught up in the mad pursuit of riches, no longer self-centered and fear-focused, no longer quibbling about who gets what, we get to share our goods, a sign of our new-found goodness. We dare now to use our wealth in the service of our neighbor, especially the poor, the homeless, the outcasts of society—those who have no inheritance. Like Jesus, we get to lose so that others might gain, to die to ourselves that others may have life. True riches have to do not with how much money we have, but rather with how much love we share. While others choose to drift in the darkness, fooled by the riches that have no lasting value, no longer “storing up treasures for ourselves” (v. 21), we get to share “the family inheritance” (v. 13), happy to be called God’s fools.