

12 PENTECOST
AUGUST, 2016

FIRST, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; Luke 12:13-21

Proclaim Christ Crucified

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

“²⁰ But 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?’

*²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves
but are not rich toward God.”*

I am... a rich fool... in a number of ways... some sinful, a few saintly.
Let me explain...

As I mentioned in the announcements, our daughter is preaching her last sermon tomorrow/today as a Minnesotan. Monday morning, she, our grandchildren, and my wife will start driving to Atlanta, Georgia, where they will join Tim who has already relocated. There they’ll begin the next chapter in their lives – that is, my daughter, son-in-law and their kids – NOT MY WIFE!!! Caroyn’s coming home to me – at least, she **said** she would!

Moving a household, as many of you know, is not an easy task. What to save, what to sell, what to give away...it’s a challenge. As Carolyn and I discovered before moving to Marshall after living in the same Alaskan house for 13 years: it’s not difficult at all to see ourselves as “rich fools.”



Truly we are rich in **so** many ways...and I mean us – and you! – together! If you don't believe me, take a look around when you're at home...look through your house/your apartment and identify the things that you would **ABSOLUTELY** need to take if you were given only two hours to pack and leave your home for good.

I think the consensus would be that it's not so much the big ticket items that would hurt our hearts to leave behind – I mean, what's a big screen t.v. worth if you don't have electricity?

No, I think we'd be more likely to get tripped up on the little things, the mementos, the memorabilia...which has proven itself true for our daughter as well.

Rachel wrote this about her packing experience:

I'm starting to feel like the rich fool.

And the reason I feel like the rich fool is not necessarily because of the amount of stuff we have; the reason I feel like the rich fool is how hard it is to part with some of it.

I feel like the rich fool when I'm standing amid a mountain of possessions that are patiently waiting their turn to be tucked into boxes...and I can't move forward with packing because I'm frozen in place, turning over and over in my hands two broken bottle stoppers.



I bought them when I was traveling in Venice, Italy, with my best friend back in 2006. They broke almost immediately, which tells you exactly how much I spent on them; but I couldn't bear to toss them because I'd spent so much time picking them out, and had such fond memories of our trip, and was absolutely certain that I could fix them someday!

So I tucked them away, carefully, in 2006...and proceeded to move them, still broken, no less than four more times. I stood in my kitchen this week, with those two broken wine bottle stoppers in my hands, and had to force myself to turn, put my hand over the garbage, and let them go.

*I am starting to **understand** the rich fool.*

*I am starting to **feel** like the rich fool.*

*I **am** the rich fool.*

The rich fool in Jesus' parable plans to build himself some new barns because the old ones can't handle the bounty of his crops. Things are so good, in fact, that he also plans to quit working and start enjoying his success, to eat, drink and be merry...for the rest of his life.

*Yet with one fell swoop, Jesus seems to **destroy** that image of a comfortable retirement...which should make a **lot** of people **nervous**, folks who have I.R.A.'s or 401 (k)'s or other retirement programs.*

That's certainly true for the Fullers. Life has become much more comfortable for Carolyn and me now that our kids are well into their careers. And, partly because of that we've been able to save and assure that we'll be taken care of for a good number of years...or so we're led to believe!!

And yet...I didn't grow up like that. I remember a "vacation" we took when I was about 5 years old. It was my Mom, my two older sisters and me – I don't know why Dad didn't come...Anyway, we drove from Shelby, Montana, (which lies just south of the Canadian border) down to Yellowstone National Park.



I have some great memories of that trip – things you'd expect like the sense of adventure and the beauty of Yellowstone Park. I also remember some things that you might **not** expect: the fact that we spent a few nights in motels that were definitely NOT AAA approved; and that we never ate in a restaurant anywhere on our trip.

Sandwiches, fruit, celery and carrots were just fine for three meals a day.



I **also** remember eating a lot of **soda** crackers – way **more** than I **wanted** – and I couldn't remember **why**. So I called Mom this week and asked her if she remembered the vacation we'd taken without Dad to Yellowstone. *Of course I remember it*, she said.

So I asked her: *Why were we eating soda crackers in the car?*

She laughed and said, *We figured out that if we stayed in **cheap motels** and **didn't spend too much on food**, we could have another **whole day** for vacation.*

My mom insists that we all agreed to these conditions before setting out on our journey...but I don't recall that conversation. All I know is that it took me a while before I could even look at another soda cracker!

But now...now...

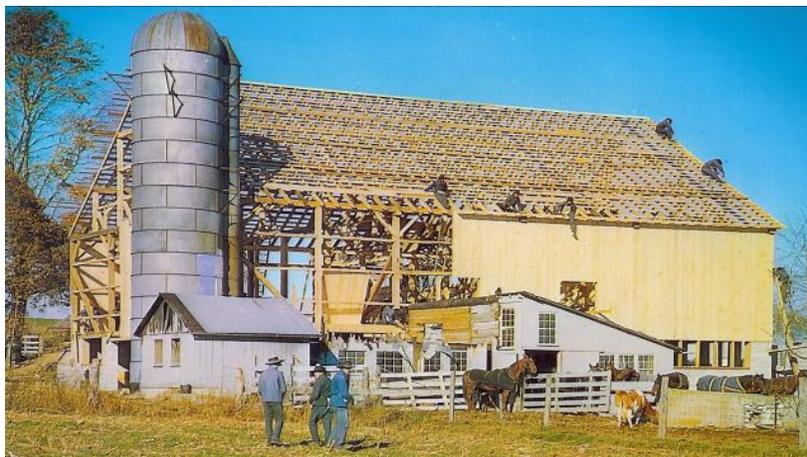
I'm starting to understand the rich fool.

I'm starting to feel like the rich fool.

*I **am** the rich fool.*

How about you – might you be the rich fool too?

Before we go any further, I think we need to make an important distinction. **Q: Is there anything inherently evil about building bigger barns (or bigger savings/retirement accounts)??**



If not, then, where is the rich farmer's failing? Why does God call him a fool for looking forward to a life of ease in retirement?

The problem with the rich farmer's approach to life, I believe, is that he seems to be embracing what the *world* has to offer at the **expense** of **thanking** God and continuing to **serve** God for all that the Lord has done...

His self-centered focus **might** be

-due to *selfishness* (he earned it – it's his to enjoy as he wants): OR

-*fear* that everything he's worked for might **disappear**...just like that!

-OR it might be due to *doubt* that God will provide.

A couple of years ago, Jeff Greathouse, the campus pastor at SMSU, was at a football game and overheard two moms sitting in front of him talking about the craziness of their kids' schedules. They both agreed that they needed to cut out *something* to restore a sense of sanity to their lives. Then one that she going to cut church out of the mix because everything else their child was in offered the potential for a college scholarship...

I wonder if the rich fool's trust lies in the *healthy* promises of **God**, or in the *slippery* promises of the **world**???

Is it possible to build barns and retirement programs all the while maintaining our trust in God??? Tell me what you think...

Jesus is **not** saying that it's wrong to have possessions and provisions for retirement. No, in truth it's a matter of the heart, it's more a matter of
 -Whom/what do you *love*?
 -To whom/what do you *devote* your *passion*? Or:
 -to which G(g)od do you owe *thanksgiving*, and **how** does
 -*service of one's neighbor fit into your formula for a good life?*

God's not commanding us to disinvest from our finances as a sign of trust that God will provide. Nor is it evil to have our kids/grandkids in activities that may provide a scholarship or two when it comes to college.

The **problem** arises when we look to a **worldly** system – ANY system – for the promise *that it will*:

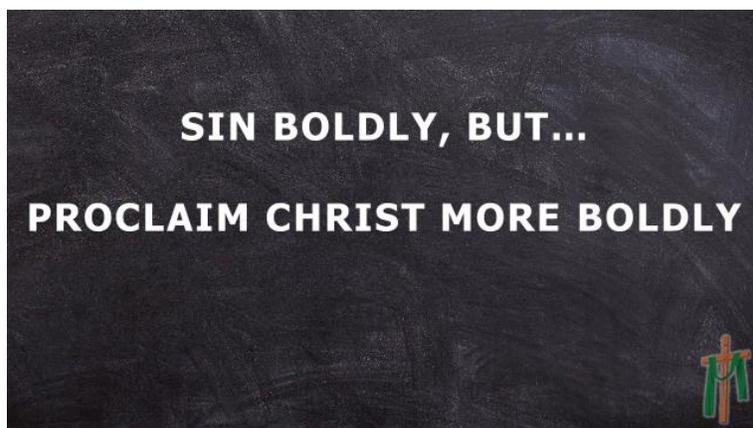
- give us this day our daily bread
- forgive us our sins
- save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil
- be with us as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death
- be our rod and staff that helps us fear no evil
- prepare a table for us in the presence of our enemies
- be our goodness and mercy that follow us all the days of our lives, and
- provide a heavenly home in which we will dwell in peace forever...

No worldly system can promise **any** of that – if they do, it’s a lie. If we’re looking to the world to provide us with **security** for our **souls**, then we’re truly *looking for love in all the wrong places*.

At the heart of the matter, it **is** a **question of trust** – in this way:

God, I’m convinced, wants us to **enjoy** life: to find **fulfillment** in hard work, to find **delight** in life’s pleasures, and to find **assurance** in saving for the future. BUT that’s not *all* – God **also** wants us, calls us, commands us to be **PASSIONATE** about **serving** the **Lord**, **caring** for the **world** and **loving** our **neighbors**.

In short, God wants us to be **fools for Christ**, daring to preach Christ crucified as if we **truly believe** that we would have **NOTHING** in life were it not for God’s goodness, God’s love, God’s grace...



Martin Luther once said that we are to SIN BOLDLY...but PROCLAIM CHRIST MORE BOLDLY. Obviously he's **not** inviting us to **indulge** our **fantasies** regardless of who we **hurt** and how **badly**, and then trust that **all** will be forgiven if we simply **confess** our **sins** to **God**.

Instead, Luther's encouraging us to avoid the trap of becoming paralyzed by guilt – as if *our little puppy sins* could somehow defeat **God's commitment to forgive**, and **give new life**, and **restore** broken **relationships**. SIN BOLDLY, for Luther, means that: *we've been set free by Jesus Christ to accept ourselves as people who struggle with sin*. That's it – don't **beat** yourself **up** for **failing** to be perfect, don't let guilt grind you **down**, don't let **regrets** from the **past** ruin the **beauty** of **God's blessed future**.

And the BEST way to do **ALL** of that...is to proclaim Christ even **more boldly** than we **sin** – proclaim him in **all** that we think, do and say.

The world delights in telling us that such a way of life is **foolish** – that the **only** way to live secure is to **carve out** your little **kingdom** and **guard** it with **everything** you **have**, every **fiber** of your **being**.

But here's the deal. **We know that's not true** – for we've been given the vision of one who's NOT rich in **worldly** matters, but **wealthy** *beyond belief* in **relational** matters.



Jesus understands that each and every life of ours is worth a **spiritual fortune**: why **else** would he claim to be the shepherd who willingly **leaves** the 99 to find the **little sheep** that is lost; and why would he forever **seek out** those who are the last, the lost, the least and the lowly, **throughout** the *world*, throughout all *time*?

Here's the nugget of truth for us in this story of the rich fool:

*When we hold on to things, people, ideals, to the **exclusion** of all else, it's **not** because we **love** or **value** them **too much**; it's because of **fear**. Fear that we'll be alone. Fear that we won't be (or have) enough...fear that we won't be **strong** enough, **smart** enough, **spiritual** enough. Greed is really just another form of fear; and fear, as FDR once famously said, is the **only** thing we have to fear.*

Lucky for us, Jesus Christ is even richer and even more foolish than we are, for his perfect love casts out fear.

In fact, Jesus is the perfect image of the Court Jester.



Does anyone know what the **role** of the Court Jester was in the Middle Ages?

The Court Jester was also called *The Fool* = and it was his job to tell the king the truth as he saw it.

Court jesters, we're told, often were granted a "comic dispensation," a "Freedom from all Constraint." They could say anything about anyone, including the king. The jester kept the master in check, giving him an honest assessment of his decisions, character, and actions.

<http://bostonlyricopera.blogspot.com/2014/03/the-history-of-court-jester-by-magda.html>

Jesters could also give bad news to the King that no one else would dare deliver. The best example of this is in 1340, when the French fleet was destroyed at the [Battle of Sluys](#) by the English. [Phillippe VI](#)'s jester told him the English sailors "don't even have the guts to jump into the water like our brave French".^[5] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jester>

So, in essence, the Court Jester, the Fool, was the **only** one the king could count on to **speak the truth**. In **that** regard, we are **proud** to call ourselves *fools for Christ*, **eager** to speak the **foolishness** of the **Gospel**, which **is**, it turns out, the **ultimate truth about life and death...**



So it is that we're called to open our hands to God, a **simple** action that accomplishes **two very important things**. When we *open our hands to God*, we have to **let go** of the **worldly** things to which we usually cling and grasp. **And**, *when we open our hands to God*, that action draws the attention of our body, mind and soul **away** from the things of **this world** and **toward** the **good and gracious will of God**.

In this **wonderfully positive position**, I am a rich fool – *ready, willing* and *able* to proclaim the good news of God's love in Christ Jesus for all people. Call me a fool...but that's the truth. Amen.