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Luke 12: 13-21

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“The Great Seduction”

There is a sub-theme that works its way through the bible. We find it in some of the oldest writings, like the books of Job and Proverbs, and it is often mentioned by the prophets and captured in the poetry of the psalms. This theme is the contrast between wisdom and foolishness. To be wise, from a biblical point of view, isn't so much about what we have in our minds as it is what we have in our hearts. To be wise is to be faithful. The deepest wisdom is a life with God. Now, on the other side, the deepest foolishness is assuming we are living with God but, in fact, giving ourselves to other powers and promises. This can be tricky because sometimes we aren't aware of the slippery slope that slides us away from God and toward a spiritually disconnected life. We're not aware because we stubbornly convince ourselves that the decisions we're making and the life-style we are choosing is the smartest way to go.

We have a two car garage attached to our home. It's designed for two cars but it's not much bigger than that. I've often thought how helpful it would have been if the builders of our home had given us a little more room. I'm not saying I wish we had bigger barns because, in fact, we don't have any barns. But, a bigger garage would have been nice. Because of the size, we have to be strategic in the way we store things and how the cars are parked so we have room to move around the space. Now, Kelly has the car she primarily drives and I have mine. The other evening, as we were heading out to run an errand, I pointed out to Kelly that she had parked her car in the garage in such a way that it made it hard to move around. I told her she had missed the mark and was cramping the walkway. “Oh,” she said, “really? Did I do that?” “Oh,” I responded sheepishly, “that's right. I drove your car yesterday. I pulled the car into the garage.” I felt foolish, mostly because I was so sure of my rightness. This is the way it usually happens. We don't see the error of our ways until someone points it out to us. There's nothing quite as foolish as assuming I am the wise one when, in fact, I'm the one missing the mark. If you've ever had that feeling than you are ready to hear what Jesus is teaching us.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus instructs his followers on the importance of staying strong in their commitment to him. Right in the middle of his teaching a man pushes to the front of the crowd and asks Jesus to help him solve an issue with his family's inheritance. Wow, this is one of those places in the bible that is so real to life. Maybe you have experience tension in your family regarding possessions or fairness. Maybe you've experienced the struggle of financial worry. It all hits pretty close to home. Right away, Jesus tells the man it isn't his job to make those kind of judgements. This is Jesus' way of saying that to follow him doesn't remove us from discerning what is right. Deciding what is of value and how it impacts our lives is our task. Jesus doesn't do it for us. What Jesus does do is remind the man what matters most. Here, the contrast between the wise and the foolish breaks through. The only way to go, according to Jesus, is to put God first.

It's a good story Jesus tells about the man who decided to build bigger barns. We get his point but without deeper thought we might lighten up the meaning Jesus intends. Maybe you've heard this saying, “One thing you'll never see is a hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer.” The lesson is obvious. We can't take it with us. Whatever awaits us beyond the grave, none of the things we cling to in this world will go with us. Is this what Jesus is teaching? Maybe on the surface but it goes deeper. Jesus isn't teaching us about what happens when we die. Jesus is talking about how we live, and the man who wanted bigger barns was missing out on the truer, wiser, and more faithful way to live. He was sliding down the slope and didn't know it. He thought protecting his wealth, securing his success, hoarding his possessions was the wise thing to do but in the story God calls him a “fool.” When this happens in the story it's a wakeup call, especially regarding our decisions about what is most valuable to us. It all starts feeling like a bad news story but let's remember that the gospel of Jesus Christ is always good news. Going deeper in the story reveals the word of life for us.

Two key points in Jesus' teaching rescue us from lives of foolishness. First, the story says the time came when God demanded the man's life. As people of faith we know life is a gift. Every new day is a blessing and every breath is the result of God's grace. God gives us life but God isn't hands off after giving the gift. Life is most fulfilled when we acknowledge that God always holds our lives in God's hands. The Bigger Barn Man didn't think about that. He gave in to the seduction that what he had was because of his skill and his know-how. If he had felt gratitude for the way God provided in his life he would probably have decided differently. This is why we in the church focus on opportunities to give. We offer to others out of our abundance because it is true what it says in another place in the bible, there is nothing we have that we did not receive. (1 Cor. 4:7) God demanded the man's life and this is ultimately good news. The God who creates us, sustains us, and never let's us go. When we remember whose hands are holding us than what we choose to hold is touched by God, too.

The second key point in Jesus' story is that God is our true source of security and this is the best antidote to an anxious life. I've shared before what John D. Rockefeller said when he was asked how much money is enough? He said, "Just a little bit more." This is another way wealth and possessions seduce us. The Bigger Barn man thought that with all his success he could just sit back "eat, drink and be merry." That sounds good but the reality is no amount of worldly goods can take away all the worry. Rockefeller knew this and so do we. Barns come and go. Larger garages aren't the answer. All of our stuff has a shelf life. The good news is we are secure in God because the words of the psalmist are as true now as they were when they were written long ago. "The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever." (Psalm 136)

I have no doubt that at various times in the week to come we will make decisions about what we save, what we spend, what we will keep and what we will give away. Jesus won't make these decisions for us but because we have chosen to live our lives with him, what we most value in life will guide both our minds and our hearts. Amen.