

A few years ago, the *New Yorker* printed a glowing review of Woody Allen's film, *Blue Jasmine*. And the reviewer concluded by saying that Woody Allen had done a great job of satirizing the lifestyles of the rich, who cocoon themselves against the world's troubles with their luxuries. But alas, in the end—as Allen showed in his film—their luxuries cannot protect them in times of disaster. Well, isn't that impressive that a writer for the *New Yorker* can castigate the readers of the *New Yorker* with that kind of statement! And isn't it amazing that someone like Woody Allen, in his satirical movie *Blue Jasmine*, would castigate people like me who would go to see Woody Allen movies! And so we shouldn't be surprised when Jesus castigates people like you and me, who come here to church to hear the words of Jesus.

He does that in one of his most prominent parables that you and I just heard read. It's a parable about a man, a wealthy landowner, whose wise business practices have produced an abundant harvest. In fact, the harvest is so abundant that he doesn't have enough room for it all in his barns. And so he makes the move to tear down his old barns and build bigger ones, so that they're big enough to hold all the grain from his great harvest. And once he puts every last grain in its proper place, he expects to find contentment. He says to himself, "Okay, soul. Now you can rest easy. You've got it made!"

Now, this man is the epitome of the American dream. After all, from our point of view, this man's success is a result of hard work and determination. He's got good business sense, great management skills, and shows smart leadership. And this man also has the wisdom to make the best use of what he has—for him, it's a kind of savings account. He can draw from it as needed, sell it at a high cost when the supply gets scarce and the demand goes up. In our world, this man would be applauded for his prudence. In fact, Aristotle taught that prudence was one of the highest moral virtues, and one of the most difficult to teach. So, it seems like he's got it all, and everything's going just fine . . . until God shows up.

God enters the story, and says only a few words. "You fool!" Isn't it ironic, that the one you and I would call bright, successful, a model example for how to conduct good business, God calls "fool." Now, why is that?

Well, in the Bible a fool isn't just some dope, somebody who doesn't know how to run their own affairs. Again, from our perspective, this rich man's pretty wise. No, in Psalm 14—the first verse—the Bible teaches that a fool is someone who says in their heart, "There isn't any God." A fool is someone who lives as if God isn't. A fool, in Scripture, is someone who's at the center of their own universe—who believes they're all that there is. A fool is the type of person who says, "I'm only responsible for me"—the type who thinks they have to answer to nobody but themselves. That's the way this rich man is, and that's why God calls him "fool!"

No wonder most of the story is in monologue. "I know what I shall do," says the rich man. "I will tear down **my** barns, and I will build bigger ones. And I will say to **myself**, 'Soul, take it easy. You've got it all!'" Notice how it's all in monologue—"I," "me," "my," "I will say to myself . . ." But God interrupts. He comes and says, "You fool!"

Now, I know people like the rich man in today's parable. I know people who have no lack of wealth, plenty of things, and have lots of advantages. So much so, in fact, that they don't know what to do with it all, or where to put everything. And while they might worry about how to manage it, they can otherwise rest easy. I'm sure you know people like that too—we all do. Because, to some degree, you and I *are* the man in this parable. In one way or another, he's each one of us.

You might not consider yourself rich, especially as you drove through this neighborhood to get here, but think about it. Like the rich man, we have more than we need, but funny how that doesn't stop us from buying more and more. And while we might not build bigger barns to house it all, we do have trouble knowing where to put everything—we use our basements, we stick things in our attics, we even stuff our closets. Garages were invented to keep cars, y'know, but strangely they get used instead for other storage. And if our garages get too filled, many of us rent out storage units. The fact that professional organizers can actually earn a living really says something. So, like the rich man, we also think in

terms of “I,” “me,” and “my;” “I will say to myself, ‘Soul, from here on, it’s smooth sailing!’” But then today, God intrudes—interrupting our monologue.

A while ago, there was a TV craze—all those shows about hoarding. When you listened to those people talk, the reason they gave for why they keep so much stuff was because they thought that someday they might need it. And if you’ve ever seen those shows, then you know how sad they are. These people stack things up from floor to ceiling. Everywhere, stuff’s piled up. First, the counter space in the kitchen gets cluttered, then spills over onto the stove, the sink gets crowded—eventually they wall themselves off from being able to use the kitchen. Then, the rest of the house gets walled off too—the dining room, the living room, even the walkways. Finally, like desert island survivors, they’re left stranded on their beds. It’s the last place they have to do anything—eat, watch TV, just sit even. And all the while, their brains are telling them, “Soul, you’ve got ample goods laid up—take it easy.” Yet, their hearts are telling them something else.

You see, with their living situation the way it is, there’s no way for them to host any company. Nobody can come into their homes. Friends and family are held at bay by mountains of possessions. The world is kept out by a great wall of belongings. Behind the stacks and stacks of personal property, each hoarder sits all by themselves, isolated and alone. No matter how much they fill their lives with stuff, they could never hope to fill the great void that grows emptier with each passing day.

I don’t think I’m overstating the case by saying that such hoarding shows are a literal depiction of what’s going on inside each of us—the rich fool, you, and me. We might not show it outwardly like that, but nevertheless that’s a perfect picture of our lives. We purchase and accumulate in desperate attempts at security, frantic efforts to insulate ourselves from disaster, we grasp at happiness and contentment as if they were things that money could buy. But like those hoarders blocking out their loved ones, all we end up doing is keeping out the one thing that matters, the only thing that means anything at all—God. The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” And when we put so much stock in stuff, we live as if God doesn’t exist.

There was another rich Man though, who literally had everything. The world was His oyster—there wasn’t anything on the planet He didn’t own. You could consider Him the King of kings or the Lord of lords. He had ample goods laid up—the best of the best even—enough that He would never run out. It would’ve been easy for Him to say to Himself, “Relax, live it up! What more could you need!” But He didn’t, because that would’ve been foolish. He would’ve been a fool, living as if *you and I* didn’t exist.

So, instead of sitting on His stuff, content to live in His big empty mansion in the sky, He gave it all up. He, the omnipresent God, restricted Himself to one place, squeezing into human flesh. He, the omnipotent Lord, came in meekness, faced hunger and want, didn’t even have a place to lay His head. He, the eternal, uncreated, Alpha and Omega, suffered and died—breathing His last, bowing His head, and giving up His spirit. And why?

Well, the author of Hebrews tells us in the twelfth chapter—“Jesus . . . for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” It was all for you—YOU—*you* are the joy that was set before Him. He gladly risked life and limb. With pleasure, He stormed the gates of hell. To Him, it was no trouble. Because He was doing it for you, His joy. If ever there was a cheerful giver, it was Jesus. He gave and gave—giving away all that He had, even His own life—for you, the joy that was set before Him.

It’s sad to think that the rich man never knew a God like that. He went his whole life without such a relationship, and that explains why he did what he did. He never experienced such a refuge, such security, so he was never able to be a help to anyone else. He went through his days tight-fisted, keeping his abundant harvest all to himself, he was afraid to let go. Anyone would’ve thought this man had everything, yet he was without the only thing that mattered at all. And that’s why he’s called a “fool.” But I wonder how things would’ve gone had he known Jesus.

A little girl named Hanna knew Jesus. I just came across her story. She was born with Down syndrome, but that didn’t stop her from living the love of Christ. One year, her elementary school put on a fall festival. One of the games she

played that day was a stuffed animal walk. It was like a cake walk, but instead of cakes you could win your choice of either one big stuffed animal or two little ones.

So, there was Hanna with three other little girls, all going around in a circle. When the music started to play, you could see it in their eyes how they each hoped to win. Then, suddenly the music stopped, and the numbers were called. And the winners turned out to be both Hanna and another little girl. Well, they each chose the two small stuffed animals—four total between them.

But since two of the girls hadn't won anything, Hanna was quick to give one of her animals away—all the while, looking at the other little girl who had also just won. Feeling pressured, the little girl hugged her animals tight and said, "I love these." So, Hanna then gave her remaining animal to the other little girl who hadn't won either. That left Hanna without an animal—and all this she did without prompting! The other little girl who had won then saw how giving Hanna was, and with great hesitation eventually gave one of her animals to Hanna. Hanna then gave her a big hug and said, "Thank You!" No doubt, knowing the cheerful giving of Jesus made Hanna a cheerful giver!

After you know somebody like Jesus, you can't help but go away different. You don't act like that rich man in the parable anymore, but knowing what Jesus gave for you, the little that you give doesn't seem like so much anymore. And what you do give away doesn't matter anyway, since you can never lose the only thing that does—Jesus your Savior. And with His Spirit living in you, with Him you also find it a great blessing to be a blessing! For the joy that is set before you—the joy of others—you can endure the cross of giving. Giving just gets that much more cheerful.

So, try it out this week—experiment! See if you don't get back more than you give. Have some fun with it! You'd be a "fool" not to.