

Luke 12: 13-21 Parable of the Rich Fool
Proper 13
Year C

St. Peter's Glenside
Laura Palmer

While I began this sermon yesterday, I heard the news of the WalMart shooting in El Paso. Two were confirmed dead and I thought about having a minute of silence for each before starting the sermon. By the time I finished, writing, that was impossible. 20 were dead and 26 wounded. Early this morning, news of a mass shooting in Dayton, Ohio. 9 murdered there and 16 wounded. Remembering the 3 killed and 16 wounded at the Garlic Festival in Gilroy, California last weekend this has been a savage week of gun violence in our country. What's come back to me is this question, a refrain from an anthem from the sixties: "How many deaths will it take till they know that too many people have died?"

And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord my strength and my redeemer, AMEN.

See if these words remind you of how your day began:

"We get up in the morning and go to the bathroom and reach over for a sponge, and that's handed to us by a Pacific Islander. Then we reach over for a bar of soap, and that's given to us from the hands of a Frenchman. And then we reach up for our towel, and that's given to us by a Turk. And then we go to the kitchen for breakfast, getting ready to go to work. Maybe this morning we want to follow the good old American tradition, and we drink coffee. That's poured in our cups by a South American. Or maybe we are desirous of having tea. Then we discover that that's poured in our cup by a Chinese. Or maybe we want cocoa this morning, and then we discover that that's poured in our cup by a West

African. Then we reach over for a piece of toast, only to discover that that's given to us at the hands of an English-speaking farmer, not to mention the baker. And so before we finish eating breakfast in the morning we are dependent on more than half of the world."

Sound familiar? A bit like how you started your day? Those words were preached nearly 60 years ago by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. How little has changed. The fact of our dependence on each other is the same now as it was two thousand years ago. Just as is the human tendency to say "I've got mine, good luck getting yours." There's a reason toddlers need to be taught that sharing is good. It doesn't come naturally. We want to keep what we have. In the sixty or so words of Luke's text this morning, "I" or "Me" is used 13 times.

Jesus does not condemn wealth. Nor does he arbitrate the dispute between the two brothers, just as he avoided getting between Mary and Martha.

Instead he tells a story in what's known as the "Parable of the Rich Fool." The rich man is not criticized for the success he's apparently worked hard to achieve. He's criticized for his attitude toward it. If he just tears down the barn and builds a bigger one, he'll be able to quite literally, in the words of Luke to, "Eat, drink, and be merry."

The rich fool expresses no gratitude. He felt his abundance was just that, his. “The point is you can’t be too greedy,” wrote Donald Trump in *The Art of the Deal*. The rich fool in the parable could have given his workers a bonus, offered them grain to feed their families, or sold the excess and helped those in need. The thought never crossed his mind.

As citizens of one of the richest nations in the history of the world, we live in abundance. We are a nation of 327 million and it’s easy to take our abundance for granted, forgetting that 2.8 billion people survive on less than \$2 a day which doesn’t even buy a latte.

Many of you are perhaps familiar with the beautiful African word, unbuntu, which translates as “I am because we are.”

That’s what Jesus is getting at. If we fail to see our interconnection to each other, our lives may be rich and abundant, but our souls, which are everything to God, remain impoverished.

If we fail to see our dependence on God, our faith is hollow. “This man was a fool because he felt that he was the creator instead of a creature,” said Dr. King, “He

talked as if he regulated the seasons. He talked as if he controlled the rain. He talked as if he controlled the setting and the rising of the sun...and there is nothing new about this foolishness. It is still alive today.”

60 years later, it's painful to realize this is dramatically *more true* today. Rich fools that we all are, we're rapidly succeeding at destroying our planet.

Each year since 1970, when this was first measured, scientists report that humans have used more ecological resources than the planet can regenerate, by depleting the oceans, cutting down forests and by releasing more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than ecosystems can absorb.

Climate change is a scientific fact. Despite the President's denial of it.

Last year's report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on climate change said we had 12 years to avert climate catastrophe. Some now say that the crucial turning point will be by the end of 2020, 18 months from now when we have to be making huge reductions in our carbon emissions to even have a shot at halting our full-speed-ahead path of destruction. We'll elect our next President within those same 18 months and it's no longer hyperbolic to say this is the defining election of our lifetimes.

In conclusion, Dr. King's sermon nearly sixty years ago has one more lesson to

teach. It's about race relations and white supremacy.

Nine days ago, President Trump characterized Baltimore as a disgusting rat and rodent infested mess where "No human being would want to live." But thousands of human beings do live there, many of whom are represented by Congressman, Elijah Cummings, an African-American and frequent critic of the President. In a tirade of tweets, Trump called him a bully and a hypocrite for criticizing border conditions where thousands of migrants and children continue to languish in deplorable conditions.

Preached King, "For what is white supremacy but the foolish notion that God made a mistake and stamped an eternal stigma of inferiority on a certain race of people? What is white supremacy but the foolishness of believing that one race is good enough to dominate another race? What is white supremacy but the foolish notion of believing that certain people are to be relegated to the status of things rather than being elevated to the status of persons? There is no greater

foolishness than the foolishness that accompanies our inhumanity to man."

AMEN

