

*“A person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.” [Luke 12:21] Please say that verse out loud with me in order to let it sink into our consciousness this morning... *“A person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”**

Three years ago I preached on the Gospel text we have in front of us this morning. My children have never let me forget it. This is really unusual because my children do not have long memories when it comes to my words spoken either at home or in the pulpit.

But there was something from that message three years ago that they latched onto. At least, there was one phrase from that message that they never let me forget – the phrase was: *“bigger barns.”*

“I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger barns,” the man says in this parable. I must have talked about that bigger barn theme a lot three years ago.

Shortly after that sermon I wanted to buy something at Best Buy. My formally kind and gracious daughter said, “I don’t know, Dad. I don’t think it will fit into our barn. Better not buy it.”

My formally favorite son, Sam, also got into the flow of this bigger barn thing. When I wanted to buy something else one day Sam said, “Dad, we do not want to have to build a bigger barn. You know what the Bible says about bigger barns.”

For three years they have been attempting to limit my purchases with references to having to build bigger barns. I have noticed that they are not too concerned about the size of their own barns...

We do not need to talk too much about the bigger barns thing this morning. Obviously I over addressed that last time around! But also, we are aware that this is an issue for our lives. Our OT Lesson says, *“No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content.”* [Ecc 1:8]

We know that we have a tendency to be drawn into a materialism that enslaves us and a self-centeredness that defeats us. That is what happened to the man whose goal in life was to build bigger barns for himself. He had no family and he had no community – he just had a lot of big barns.

We need to note that Jesus is not upset with the fact that the man had wealth. Jesus was warning about what the man did with his possessions.

Hoarding and self-indulgence at the expense of our neighbors is always offensive to God. Jesus warns us against a materialism that enslaves us and a self-centeredness that defeats us. We know that.

So here is what we are going to think about this morning: God does not want us to build bigger barns just for ourselves, but God does want us to build.

If we do not focus on building bigger barns, then what do we focus on building? Well,

- God wants to build character.
 - God wants to build disciples.
 - God wants to build friendships.
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It is special to build something of value. When I went to the Habitat for Humanity house this summer that Pont helped to build, there were about 18 of the sweatiest Pontoppidan members I have ever seen in one place! Every one had a look on their face that this... this was special. There are some special things we are called to build.

God wants to build. St Paul said, *“You are God’s building... Whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ.”* [1 Corinthians 3:9-11]

Circle the words, *“You are God’s building.”* I see a picture of God like those sweaty Pont members at the Habitat House. God is working. God wants to build us up!

God is working on your heart and your spirit. God gives energy and time and work to your heart and spirit. God wants to build you up. *“You are God’s building.”*

God is building a bigger – not a bigger barn – but God is building a bigger sanctuary for himself in your heart and spirit. And this is what God wants to build.

- *God wants to build a bigger family.*

The parable about the seed being cast, and some being choked and dried up, but some producing 100 fold – that is a parable about God growing his family.

The parables in Luke 15 about the lost coin and the lost sheep and the lost son – those are all about God delighting in finding his children and growing his family – one by one. God delights in a great big family.

I grew up with one brother and one sister. There were many days growing up when I thought I had at least one too many siblings, and some days when I thought I had two too many siblings.

I know that my brother and sister thought the same thing about me, and for very good reasons. Bigger families can be a challenge. Most of the time I did not want more family; two siblings was more than enough.

Sometimes we get pretty satisfied with the brothers and sisters in Christ that we have. But God always wants one more person in his family.

And I wish – oh how I wish – that I could have each and every one of you come to our next new member class. What a joy it is to get to know these new brothers and sisters. God is always building a bigger family.

- *God wants to build a better fellowship.*

This past week 60,000 people attended “We Fest” out in the Detroit Lakes area. 500,000 people passed through Sturgis and the Black Hills. Both of those events are a lot of people getting together.

It is fun to get together around things such as Country Music or Motorcycles. But you can only do that once a summer or so.

God invites us to get together with other Christians every week; one reason we gather to build one another up. The Bible says that we are to *“encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.”* [1 Thessalonians 5:11]

When we come together in our growing fellowship we have these four things we hold in common. Let me remind you of them:

1. In our fellowship we believe that we are created by God.

I visit with all sorts of people who believe that they are an accident of nature; that the universe and life just happened. But in this fellowship we believe that God’s hands are all over us – we have that in common.

2. In our fellowship we confess that we have all been convicted of sin.

We know that we have sinned against God and against one another, so our fellowship is filled with things like forgiveness and mercy and second chances and do-overs and humility.

In this fellowship we talk about the amendment of life and we sing songs like “Change my heart, O God.”

3. In our fellowship we believe that all can be connected to Christ.

Did you know that right now, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is right next to you?

Let me ask a question: Who would you like to sit beside and shake hands with? What famous person would you like to connect with? President Bush, Bill Gates, Oprah?

You know who I would most like to meet? Worship Leaders. People like Twila Paris and Michael W. Smith and Rick Muchow. Rick is the worship leader at Saddleback church.

I remember the first time I went to Saddleback Church in CA for a conference. One evening there was a concert. Shy and quiet me was sitting in the corner towards the back. The place was filled; just a few empty seats – a few by shy and quiet me.

A wonderful group was sharing music, when who should sit down by me but the worship leader Rick Muchow! He smiles and shakes my hand and says, “Praise the Lord! Great Music!”

I look at my hand and think, “This hand that so inadequately plays guitar was touched by then hand of someone who plays and sings so well.” I have not washed my hand since...

Later Rick got up and led a time of singing praise music. I am clapping away and thinking, “That is my buddy Rick!”

In our fellowship – in the fellowship God is building – Jesus is connected by the power of the Holy Spirit to each of us.

You are in a holy place this morning... You are being touched by Jesus... You can ignore that... Or you can say, “Jesus is here. He is my buddy. He touched me.”

4. In our fellowship we are committed to eternity.

A young man had a picture of his girlfriend. On the back of the picture the girlfriend had written: “My dearest Tom, I love you with all my heart... I love you more & more each day... I will love you forever & ever... I am yours for all eternity...”

Then there was a P.S. which said: “If we ever break up, I want this picture back...”

So much of life is temporary. The shock of the bridge collapse in Mpls is that life is fragile and fleeting in so many ways. The Bible says we are dust and breath and smoke and all sorts of temporary things.

Yet Jesus says I will give you the water of life, the bread of life, the resurrection of life. In our fellowship we are build one another up in the God's promise of eternal things.

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- God is building a bigger family and a better fellowship. *And God is building a broader faith in you.*

When I was a child God was a really big police officer, a super strong parent, a brave firefighter, a grandparent with a rocking chair. Nice images for a child.

But as adults we are aware of such things as bridges that fail, global warming that threatens the world of our grandchildren, terrorism that has changed the world, jobs that are here today and gone tomorrow.

The childhood images of God must give way to a broader faith. God is building that broader faith in his followers.

I invite you to grab a Bible in front of you and open to Acts Chapter 29...

Somebody read for us from Acts 29. You can't. Why can't you read from Acts 29? Because there is no Acts 29. It is being written today – by you and me.

Acts 28 ends with these words: *“Paul lived in Rome... He welcomed all who visited him, boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ.”* [Acts 28:30,31]

You and I have a choice this week to help write Acts 29.

We can build a bigger barn. Or, we can enter more fully into God's building program: a bigger family, a better fellowship, a broader faith that is writing Acts 29. Amen.