

## **Sermon for August 1 - Luke 12 - The Danger of Big Barns**

Every UCC pastor participates in the pension fund for our denomination. The idea is that years from now when we retire we'll have enough put away so that we can live. When I came here three months ago I had to get set up in the pension program and we called the UCC offices and had them send me a registration packet.

It arrived and it was, literally, about an inch thick. There were brochures about all sorts of different funds and investment strategies. I was lost. Most ministers are not good with this investment stuff. I had no clue whether I was supposed to have an aggressive approach to investing or a semi-aggressive one or balanced or conservative. I panicked. Finally I just gave the whole thing to our church treasurer with this plea: I want to be able to eat when I'm retired.

The idea of investing makes a lot of us uneasy. We often don't know if we're doing it right. Are we putting enough away? Are we putting it in the right places? Will there be enough for us down the line?

These are not new problems. They apparently were very much present even 2000 years ago when a man called out to Jesus from the crowd saying, "Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

Even Jesus seems a little reluctant to talk about it. He tells the man, "Who made me the arbitrator?" But he goes on. He warns, ""Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

And then he tells this story: There was a man who had some land and he was doing very well. He had a lot of crops, a high yield. But he realized he didn't have enough room to store it all. So he takes down his barns, and he builds even bigger ones in their place. He says to himself, I've got it made. I've got enough

for years now. I'm going to relax and eat, drink and be merry.

Except, Jesus says, the man's life is demanded of him that night. And now what good does all that stored up grain do? And who does it belong to? He ends by telling us that it's the same as those who store up things for themselves but are not rich toward God.

Now, I grew up in the era when televangelists were preaching that if you just sent them enough money, you'd be saved. I remember watching one cry on TV and another get led away in handcuffs. Then, in Atlanta, I knew of several local mega church preachers who drove massively expensive cars. One drove a nearly \$300,000 Rolls Royce. I always thought something was wrong there. So, when I hear a preacher talking about money, I always get a little suspicious. And when I have to be the preacher who does it, I feel a little uncomfortable too.

But, sometimes the Gospel calls us to talk about stewardship. And that's what this passage is really about. It's about taking care of the things that we are given and using them in the way that God wanted us to use them. Part of the Christian life is learning how to be a good steward.

A few years ago a new movement sprang up in some churches called the prosperity Gospel. Part of it was the belief that God wanted Christians to be wealthy. Believe enough, Christians were told, and you too will be rich.

I always thought that movement missed the point. It's not that God doesn't want us to have nice things. God loves us when we are poor and God still loves us when we are rich. But the acquisition of nice things is not the end of the Gospel. Love, both God's love for us and ours for God, is the end of the Gospel.

But that doesn't mean that good things don't come from God. They do. But we do not so much own them as we are entrusted with them. We are given them, and we are called to be the good stewards, or caretakers, of them. And to that end, Jesus talks about how we use the good things we are given.

Unlike the man who builds a bigger barn so that he can horde his wealth, Jesus reminds us that we have to take the even longer view. We have to look not just

at our lives, but at the life eternal. We have to look past what we can foresee, and look at what we don't even understand yet. And then we have to fill our barns only as much as we need.

Now, this is not just about money, although that is a part of it. The Bible actually says far more about how we should handle our money and how we treat other people around it than it ever does around divorce or sex or the role of women or any other hot button issue. We just always feel a little uncomfortable talking about it. But we can't be. Because loving God with all we have means thinking about how best to use all that we have.

And that means, do we take what we have and do we store it up in barns? Do we cram those barns with far more than we could ever use? Do we sit back and say, "Now I have enough...now I can relax?? Because the reality is, no matter how much we get, we will never have "enough". We will always think that we need more.

But this is also about more than money. This is about all that we are given. It's about our time. It's about our talents. It's about our love. And it's about not being afraid to use it.

You may remember that song from when we were kids called, "This Little Light of Mine." One of the lines is, "Hide it under a bushel? No. I'm going to let it shine."

It's the same way with all we are given by God. "Hide it up in a barn? No. I'm going to share it with God."

I'm always reminded by this passage of people who are collectors. Now, that's not a bad thing. But I have had some friends who have been collectors of books or comics or toys or other things. And they have kept them in their original packaging and never opened them. They'll show them to you proudly, but they've never actually held them in their hands. I've always wondered, where's the fun in that?

It's the same way with all that we are given. If we don't use it, where's the fun in that? Now, I'm not talking about being irresponsible. Rather, I'm talking about

being generous. I'm talking about sharing. I'm talking about using what you can in a way that you don't feel like you are losing anything at all, but rather gaining things you never even expected in return.

I'm talking about using the barn to store what you need, but not making that barn your god. Not making your fear and anxiety over not having enough in the future dictate your whole life. And not making the need to fill that barn to the rafter dictate your happiness.

And maybe the greatest thing I'm talking about here is love. Because this is all about love. This is, no matter what else we are talking about, about being afraid to give away our love.

God loves us. And God gives us love for one another. But sometimes we are afraid to give that love away. It doesn't matter if that means writing a check to the food pantry or giving time for our favorite cause or maybe just listening to the person who needs to see a friendly face. It's all the same. It's about love.

Somehow we've come to believe that love is a limited resource. This is not true. Love is the one inexpendable resource that we have. Love is the one thing that creates more of itself when it is shared. Love is infinite, because love is from God. And when we leave our barns long enough to give to the food pantry, or we give our time to help build a Habitat House, or we listen to a kid who is having a rough time, we are sharing our love. And we are getting more in return.

Now, some of you might be asking yourself, am I allowed to be happy? Am I allowed to still have a good time? Or do I need to be so vigilant about not overfilling my barn with material things that I can never enjoy life again?

My answer is, yes, of course you can be happy. In fact, this passage is all about the things that will make us truly happy. This passage is about refusing to delay our life out of fear and anxiety, and instead living life today. And this passage is about the one thing that brings us more joy than anything else. It's about sharing our love in every way we can think to do it.

There is a story you may have heard about a community that didn't have much to eat. But one person had an old pot. And they had a stone. The put the stone in the pot, filled it with water, and said that they would feed everyone stone soup. It wasn't much, but it was a start.

Well, the next person came and said, "I don't have much, but I have these carrots." So now the stone soup had carrots in it. Another came with potatoes. Another with celery. Another will meat. Another with onions. Until the time came when the pot was overflowing with a delicious, filling soup.

So it is with the sharing of what we are given. Sometimes we hesitate to come to the soup pot because we think we might need what we bring. Sometimes we hesitate because we don't think what we have is really worth that much. Maybe we're even a little ashamed by how little it is. But we don't have to be. It is enough.

And so here we are. Slowly approaching the soup pot. Holding what we have been given. Saying, I refuse to store this in the barn anymore. I have enough. I will share it. we are coming fearlessly, and in love. And, ultimately, we are receiving far more than we ever thought possible. Amen.