

Sermon: "Chasing the Wind"

Text: Luke 12: 13-21 (Ecclesiastes 2:1-1-11)

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INTRODUCTION TO THE READING: Luke 2:13-21

The Teacher in Ecclesiastes repeatedly describes his endless pursuit of earthly pleasures and self-satisfaction as "a chasing after the wind." The Rabbi Teacher, Jesus tells a similar story of one who chased the wind. It's a parable; just a story, but it's a story that becomes the real story of real people again and again. Hear the reading.

SERMON:

He was a very wealthy man. He was a very intelligent man. He was a hard working man. He was a frugal man, who knew how to save rather than spend all he had. He was a prudent man, careful with what he had. He knew how to plan ahead. He thought beyond the present and prepared for years to come.

As a result he was a very successful man; the epitome of what we call "the American dream". His only problem was a problem of success; expansion. His success afforded him a great measure of independence and control. It brought him a great deal of satisfaction. He was experiencing a strong sense of security. The future was bright. He was set for years to come.

And God called him a fool! A fool?!? That's right, a fool.

Let's understand that this man is not stupid. He does not lack keenness of mind. His mind is sharp. In fact he is very intelligent. He has an excellent capacity for reasoning and learning.

But he is being foolish. Foolishness is something different than stupidity. A fool is one who lacks judgment and good sense. In ancient Jewish wisdom literature, as in Ecclesiastes and the teaching of Jesus, foolishness infers a disregard for God. It is the opposite is wisdom that flows from a regard ("fear") of God. We read much about wisdom and folly in the Bible; wise men and foolish men. Godly wisdom is a grasp of true reality with a corresponding sense of moral judgment and action.

An intelligent person can be foolish. A stupid person can be wise. It follows that a successful, wealthy person can be foolish, and a struggling pauper can be wise.

The point of Jesus' parable is really not about money, *per se*. It's been said that "money is always about more than money". The parable is not really about wealth or riches. The man's problem is not his wealth or his success. His problem is his foolishness. His problem is two-fold: a foolish delusion that leads him to foolish distraction.

He suffers from the delusion that one's life consists in the abundance of his possessions. As a result he is distracted from God, the very author of all life and the giver of all good things. And he is distracted from his neighbors in his self-containment. There is nothing here about God or thanksgiving or dependence. There is nothing about others or sharing or caring.

He has allowed his good success to lead him to a foolish sense of self-sufficiency, self-satisfaction, and self-absorption. His life is ultimately out of balance and out of focus. He is chasing the wind. He is turned in on himself, apart from any conversation with God or interaction with anyone else. He talks to himself, congratulates himself, and plans for himself.

Jesus, the master story-teller, tells this story in such a way that we can listen in on this man's conversation with himself. When the land produced abundantly, "he thought to himself." A literal rendition is "he thought within himself." His reasoning was within himself. He thinks inside himself so as to lack perspective. So he said, "I will do this"... and it all becomes what *he* will do with what is *his*. "I will pull down *my* barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all *my* grain and *my* goods. And I will say to *my* soul, 'Soul, you have ample good laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" He thinks within himself, and now he talks to himself.

He talked to himself. But God said to him.
He said, I am set "for many years". But God said, "this very night".

Our contemporary Western culture is too much affected by the delusion that our lives consist in the abundance of possessions. We are too susceptible to slick and seductive advertisement.

We keep saying, "It's the economy, stupid". God says, "Don't be foolishly deluded. Don't chase the wind. Your life is so much more.

We keep insisting on our independence and our self-sufficiency and our own security. God says, "Don't be distracted. Don't chase the wind. What about God? What about your neighbors around you and in other lands?"

Right now our changing economy, national and international, forces us to think carefully and wisely about money management, financial values, and planning. But let's not allow ourselves to be deluded by foolish notions that this is the essence of our lives. Let's not allow ourselves to be distracted from God and others around us and become self-absorbed.

That's what happens, Jesus says, when we are not rich toward God. What does that mean... rich toward God? You think about that. Take some to ponder that. What will it mean for you to be rich toward God? What will it mean for the church to be rich toward God?

Amen.