

Ann Bonner-Stewart  
St. Francis Day  
Primary Text: Luke 12:13-21  
6 October 2024

When I say the word rich what do you think? Wealthy? Well-to-do? Affluent? Maybe you think of a particular person, like Warren Buffet? Elon Musk? Taylor Swift? Me, I think of Robin Leach's show Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous, with the tagline "Champagnes, wishes and caviar dreams."

The passage I just read from Luke is appointed to help us remember a fellow we now call St. Francis. Francis was born almost 900 years ago in what is now Italy. His dad was a cloth merchant, so Francis grew up rich. When he was a young man he fought in a couple of wars, he had a long illness - both of which are often life changing experiences, which they certainly were for Francis. He gave up everything, even taking the clothes off of his back to throw them in the face of his astonished cloth merchant father. He went on to found a new community now known as the Franciscan friars, who are known for their work with folks and their, to be blunt, poverty in possessions.

The Gospel appointed from Francis is from Luke and it starts with two brothers arguing over money. Instead of settling it for them, Jesus tells a story. Jesus says, Once there was a man who had a good year, a good harvest, and thus who wanted to build all new barns to save all his goods and grains. After everything is all done, then the text says Mr. Man will say "to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" Sounds like a dream retirement in many ways.

During Mr. Man's little speech, which is a mere three verses, we have a lot of the first person parts of speech, many I's, my's, me. "What should I do, for I have no place to store **my** crops?"<sup>18</sup> Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down **my** barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all **my** grain and **my** goods.<sup>19</sup> And I will say to **my** soul..." that's 11 times in 2.5 verses, more than 4 per verse, not that anyone is counting, and highlights Mr. Man's perceived autonomy. This individual sense of control is particularly startling in something like agriculture, which is known for being super fickle. A farmer can do everything by the book, can know their crop really well, and can still have a very bad year. If there's too much water or not enough water, or the temperature drops before it normally does, or if the temperature rises too quickly, or if there is a year with a bug who likes your crop sneaks in, well then what held potential to be a good yield suddenly turns in to not so good year, maybe even a bad year, perhaps a devastating year. There is this huge large unacknowledged element of luck in Mr. Man's bounty.

And if the land did produce abundantly enough to need new giant barns, if, in fact, Mr. Man was lucky and all the conditions were favorable towards the crops that year, which it seems that they were, there is absolutely no way Mr. Man was doing all of this by himself. It would be physically impossible. There must have been people working with him for months, he would likely say for him, to make this wonderful harvest happen. He also could not tear down and then raise a barn alone. Barn raising famously takes multiple people, so much so that in 18th and 19th century rural America people managed to turn it into a party. Mr. Man did not produce all of what he has alone and thus cannot claim it all; he also was the beneficiary of luck, and that is why God calls him a fool.

Self-sufficiency is taken to an extreme in this text to illustrate a point. Jesus loves a good hyperbole, like we saw last week in Mark. And Jesus is not wrong to help us think more deeply about autonomy, because we want it. We want to be in control. We feel more secure with higher numbers, and honestly, I think it's fair in some regards, particularly since we live in a system with paper thin margins, if that, where it is increasingly up to the individual family, where the primary reason households go into bankruptcy is a medical crisis— talk about luck of the draw. We know on some level we do not have the level of control we would like and that is scary. Even the most independent among us can be brought up short by circumstance, by really bad weather, by accidents, and other things. Underneath Mr. Man's pride, and his need to control via hoarding, is fear. Mr. Man, just like us, does not know what's going to happen next. So he hedges his bets. And what's so wrong with that?

And that is right where I want us. When we feel “what's so wrong with that” in Scripture, it's an invitation, not an opportunity to dismiss. So today we have a chance to feel out what is behind this or underneath it. It is God asking us to wonder why. A relationship with the divine is much more often a conversation and dialogue than the popular culture gives it credit for. So when it seems as though God wants something from us that is not just puzzling at best, maybe give it a pause, because I do believe God wants what is best for us as a people and in the long run. That does not always, okay, honestly, rarely, aligns what the world tells us is best for us as individuals. We are called to be lives of abundance, though perhaps not necessarily an abundance of possessions. Francis, though poor, was also rich in so many ways— rich in faith, in kindness, in personal charisma, rich in love. Animals in general and our pets specifically can so easily remind us of being rich in love, and that is why so many of us love them so much. Today we also give thanks for our animals, for our pets, both past and present, stuffies, and all the ways that they can be signs of love. Stuffies can provide concrete comfort in the literal and metaphorical nights of our lives. When I say the word abundance, what do you think? Well, I'm going to tell you where some of your fellow parishioners found abundance this summer.... Family. Friends. Lazy

days readings. The long days with sun. Flowers blooming. It's a different list than before, right?

Be rich in love.