

“The More-More Craving”

Luke 12:13-21

This man seemed to have a “quality” life. Good land, a good crop, and blessed with a good business mind. He had run out of storage barns which were bursting and built entirely new. He had to build his new barns really big.

It reminds of our first call in rural North Dakota where I was serving two congregations along the Canadian border. I was blessed to have been there when there were record crops. They called their storage buildings quonsets which they normally stored their farm equipment in during the long winters. But because the elevators and railroads were so blocked up hauling grain, they had to convert their Quonsets into grain storage bins and leave their equipment outside.

At the other extreme, this past summer, many Ohio farmers including my brother, never got their fields planted because of constant rain. My brother always takes out crop insurance which isn't nearly as profitable as a good crop, but it's a lot less work. My brother always stores his soybeans because the prices are usually higher in the Spring. More storage space is good business.

Being able to store grain changed human history. It was the beginning of the market system. Before that people were hunters and gatherers living communally. With “bigger barns” we see the beginning of a class system, of rich and poor.

An early example in Genesis was when Joseph was sold into slavery by his older brothers. In a wealthy Egypt, a class system is already in place.

There's the pharaoh and his cronies at the top, most Egyptians in the middle, and then huge number of slaves brought in from conquered countries to work in the fields, to make bricks for construction, to slaughter the animals, and to do other jobs the Egyptians didn't want to do.

Enter the prophecy and advice of Joseph. Seven years of plenty followed by 7 years of famine. Build really big grain bins and store the grain for 7 years. Then for the next 7 years you can manipulate the grain market any way you want. Hungry future slaves will flock to Egypt looking for a handout to stay alive. Then they will settle here to work in our fields, mow our lawns, slaughter our animals, serve our fast food, and do anything else that we don't want to do.

That's just good business! It's a great deal for the Egyptians. It's a great deal for the Man in Jesus' parable. It's a great deal for many of us.

V.1: And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry."

So what's the problem? Eat, drink, and be merry!

There's a couple of problems. A thousand funerals later, I know better than most how fragile these bodies are that we live in for a short time. Eating, drinking, and being merry generally does not add to our longevity. It subtracts.

The other problem for the rich man is that Jewish law said that, "There shall be no poor among you." The problem is that this rich man in his planning did not plan to deal with the poor "among you." The problem is that this "bigger barn" system for this farmer all points toward making life easier and more luxurious for himself and ignoring the poor.

Bigger barns might be good business just as owning storage units to rent out is good business these days;

but if they lead to opulence and naked consumerism like the rich farmer in the parable and not for the common good, that is very bad planning for living in a morally sensitive society, especially as a follower of Jesus Christ.

There's much more to life than bigger barns. Bigger barns enslave us. Craving more and more, excessive accumulation and consumption, dominated this man's life to the exclusion of those who are hungry and thirsty and sick and in prison.

The "more-more craving" will inevitably lead to another feeling, namely, of numbness toward other people. Scripture uses the expression "hardness of heart." We turn in on ourselves and are no longer living free to serve and have compassion for others.

Over the years, I've learned over and over again that it is way more difficult to be consumed by the "more-more craving" when we are spending time with, listening to, and responding to the needs of the poor among us.

In preparing for our trip to the Tex-Mex border to help dedicate a new church building and to reconnect with our old Latino friends living just north of the border, I found an article I wrote for the Sister Parish newsletter back in the early 1990's after one of our visits to the border. It's amazing how little has changed over the past 25 years.

It's entitled, "A JOURNEY TO THE BORDER AND PERHAPS BEYOND."

The introduction reads.....

The Rev. Doug Gunkelman, was pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Fargo, North Dakota, when he joined a delegation of the Eastern North Dakota Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, to visit the Texas-Mexico Border in January, 1994. He is now pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church, Beatrice, NE, which has begun a new linkage on the Texas-Mexico border.

As we left the highway and headed down a long, asphalt road to the adult detention center, I knew we were entering a place of bondage. The compound was encircled by a high fence with strands of barbed wire at the top. We continued through two gates and eyes peered from the windows of the detention center, as we entered the security area.

The men and women inside wore orange jumpsuits and we were a curiosity—two Catholic nuns, a Hispanic woman, a Norwegian woman and a long haired man.

We entered a long hallway, lined with rooms each densely occupied with five bunks. Brown and black faces stared back at me and smiled. We had entered the women's dorm, where about 40 women shared the space. The security guard, Mr. Gonzales, shared with us the trail of tears these Latino people had traveled to get to the Border. The promised land that they believed awaited them seemed more oppressive then promising, as they awaited their court hearings. They wanted to stay nonetheless, because going back was certain death.

Our next stop down the asphalt road was a detention center for youth, who crossed the Border unaccompanied. This was the place my foster son from Honduras had found himself detained for months. We drove inside a walled-in security area and we found young boys inside playing football. They greeted us with handshakes and smiles. Inside a house, we found a living room with battered couches and a television blaring Spanish speaking cartoons. We were directed to a classroom next

door, and we sat down to hear the story of the only detention center for minors in South Texas.

During our visit the younger boys aged 8-15, crowded around, wanting to talk, while a more wary older group, 15 to 17, lingered in the background. I was certain that Vilan, my foster son, would have looked in from the outer group.

As we drove off, I looked from the van at the faces one last time. Some would be deported; others would be given asylum and still have no family in which to grow. I gave my card to a paralegal who would represent many of them and told her to call me, if they won asylum for kids like Vilan who would have no place to live. Maybe we could include one more of these children in our family.

Next we went to a home called “La Posada” – The Inn. Sister Caroline and her congregation provided this country house for refugee families and unaccompanied minors waiting for asylum hearings. Vilan had spent four months here before moving to North Dakota. Sister Caroline was wonderfully gracious and full of love. It is surely the ministry of the nuns and other women that keep the church alive and Gospel-centered. For the young children, the journey across the Border was a lonely one or perhaps their parents scattered when confronted by the Border patrol, leaving them behind.

My son, Vilan, ran from Honduras after his father was shot. It took him a year to make his way through Central America and Mexico to the Tex-Mex Border. He was beaten up and left for dead along a road in Guatemala. A Good Samaritan truck driver scooped him off the road and got him a doctor. While running from an attacker, he tripped and fell into a stick that protruded through his stomach. His journey proved long and anguishing. He was quickly caught by the Border patrol

after swimming across the Rio Grande. He was brought to the detention center. He was 17. Vilan became one of the unaccompanied minors who won asylum in the courtroom. About half do. In the detention center for minors, he learned English and had the benefit of a swimming pool, bunk bed, dorm room and three meals. I felt relieved that he had stayed here instead of the dank adult detention center. Thank God, he had not yet turned 18.

We shared stories about Vilan at a dinner prepared by a Honduran man, a Nicaraguan man and a Haitian woman, who were refugees staying at the Posada. The sojourners told of leaving families behind. The Honduran man's eyes moistened as he described his wife and children left behind. He fled from constant threats on his life.

This house, the inn, would be their last stop before freedom or deportation. I could not help but think of Mary and Joseph seeking room in the inn during their journey. And, what came of that!

It is much more difficult to be consumed by the "more-more craving" and it's much easier to live free as we know through all of our Divinity ministries, when we spend time with, listen to, and respond to the needs of the poor among us.

May the Peace of God.....

#655 – Son of God, Eternal Savior