

**FIRST PARISH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
East Derry, New Hampshire**

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5 August 2007

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Hosea 11:1-11

Luke 12:13-21

Voice 1: I've got the biggest barn you've ever seen.

Voice 2: Bet you haven't.

Voice 1: Bet I have.

Voice 2: Bet mine is bigger than yours.

Voice 1: Bet it isn't.

Voice 2: Bet it is.

Voice 1: I bet I can get more grain in my barn than you can in yours.

Voice 2: I bet I can get all your grain in my barn as well as all of mine.

Voice 1: I bet I can get all of yours, all of mine, and all of our neighbor's.

Voice 2: I bet my barn is big enough to get all your wheat, mine, the neighbor's and the entire country.

Voice 1: Well, I can get all of that in my barn plus the tractor that cut it.

Voice 2: I can get that, the tractor and a combined harvester.

Voice 1: I've got room for two combined harvesters.

Voice 2: I can hold a whole fleet of combined harvesters in my barn.

Voice 1: And a jumbo jet.

Voice 2: Two.

Voice 1: Three.

Voice 2: An airline.

Voice 3: But does it feed the hungry?

Voice 1: I have enough grain to feed a whole country.

Voice 2: I have enough grain to feed a whole continent.

Voice 3: But do you? Do you bring life with what you have?

Voice 1: I am so rich I have the best life in the country.

Voice 2: I am so rich I have the best life in the world.

Voice 3: But do you? Are you rich in love?

Voice 1: Love? But you can't store up love in a barn.

Voice 2: Not even one of our barns.

Voice 3: That's right, you can't store it up. You can only give it away.

Voice 1: But we've just built the biggest barns in the world. They'd be permanently empty.

Voice 2: What will we use them for?

Voice 3: It's not the size of your barn that makes you rich. It's the size of your heart.

“My barn is bigger than yours” – *Seasons of the Spirit Congregational Life Pentecost 1* –

It's not the size of your barn that makes you rich... So what does? Maybe the size of our houses? We're certainly building them big enough these days. Just how many McMansions, with how many garage stalls filled with how many vehicles with how many acres of lawn does it take to make a person rich? Or maybe your accumulated wealth is calculated in smaller units. Ben and I had a conversation a few weeks ago, and I really don't know what triggered it. It may have been some new clothes that wouldn't fit in to my bulging closet. Or maybe it was the stacks of books in front of the overflowing bookcases that are probably discoloring the wood of those bookcases by blocking the sun. Or maybe it was the night Ben realized my CDs no longer fit into the rack we have for holding them. It could have been any of those occasions that led him to ask what that was about, why I keep buying, when or if I'll have enough. Then he said, I thought you wanted to simplify and reduce and cut back. And not to worry, it was only a few days later that he was thinking about ordering some new electronics, and I was able to turn his question on him: I thought you wanted to simplify and reduce and cut back... I dare to say that because I know we're not unique. If we were, building and renting out storage units wouldn't be nearly such a booming business. And we wouldn't have nearly so many people playing Russian roulette with staggering credit card debt.

This morning's gospel lesson opens with a person approaching Jesus with a complaint about how unreasonable his brother was being about the family estate – you know, the family furniture, dishes, silverware, house, land and savings account that are more apt to come between family members than anything else. But Jesus wasn't about to get into the business of deciding who's greed was more honorable, so rather than settle the dispute, he told a story. It was a story about a successful farmer. Not a story about a crook or a miserable employer, but a conservative and careful farmer who knew how to make the most of the soil and the weather and good seed and plentiful fertilizer. And on top of all that, clearly nature had smiled on him and helped him profit. He worked long and hard, scurrying about and squirreling it away, until he finally got to the point when he could sit back, put his feet up and sigh a big sigh. Well done, Soul. "...you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink and be merry." Can't you just hear the rest of that sentence dangling out there? Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die... And that's exactly what happened. At which point, all that was left was a mammoth barn full of grain for his heirs to squabble over!

Clearly, the parable calls the man a fool. He lived completely for himself, he talked to himself, he planned for himself, he congratulated himself, and then he died. At which point, God said, This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have stockpiled, whose will they be now? It's striking to me that this is the only Gospel parable in which God shows up as a character, and speaks. The man may have thought he was writing his own story, controlling his own destiny, drawing things to him that would secure his future. But then he died and what good did those bounteous barns overflowing with grain do him then? When God greeted him face to face it was more than a little clear that all those mountains of grain didn't amount to a hill of beans.

So here we are, yet again. We've left our warehouses and accumulations to fend for themselves for an hour, while we do our best to traipse along behind a man who changed the course of time by carrying his belongings on his back and giving his days over to looking into people's hearts and souls, offering himself for their healing and wholeness, building a nest egg of love and

compassion and generous living. Here we are, once again, come to feast at the table he's set for us. Not a table covered with heaping platters where we'll consume more food than our stomachs can comfortably hold, only to later have to go to the club to work it off. No, this table holds only small morsels of bread and simple swallows of juice. And the nourishment that matters most in life – nourishment for the soul, hope for the hopeless, rest for the weary, peace for the tormented, joy for the brokenhearted.

The question that remains is what we'll do with our warehouses and accumulations after we've dined at Christ's table. Where we'll put our energy, which reserves we'll seek to build, how much room we'll make in our lives – for love.