

## ***“Speaking As One Fool to Another”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, August 4, 2013

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Holy Scriptures: Luke 12: 13-21 and Colossians 3: 1-11

### **Luke 12: 13-21**

Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.’<sup>14</sup> But he said to him, ‘Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?’<sup>15</sup> And he said to them, ‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’

<sup>16</sup> Then he told them a parable: ‘The land of a rich man produced abundantly. <sup>17</sup> And he thought to himself, “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, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”<sup>20</sup> But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

<sup>21</sup> So it is with those who store up treasures for

themselves but are not rich towards God.’

### **Colossians 3: 1-11**

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, <sup>3</sup>for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ who is your\* life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

<sup>5</sup> Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). <sup>6</sup>On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient.\* <sup>7</sup>These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life.\* <sup>8</sup>But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive\* language from your mouth. <sup>9</sup>Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices <sup>10</sup>and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. <sup>11</sup>In that renewal\* there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

Last Sunday morning during the Children's Faith Focus,  
the question our young people were asked was  
what words are spoken more than any other  
in this church building and in our  
congregation?

What I was thinking about are the prayerful words that are  
most frequently offered

up to the highest heavens and deep into the innermost  
recesses of our souls.

We wondered aloud what words are spoken every Sunday  
morning,

during weddings, funerals and celebration services,  
plus every evening at the gathering in of  
Narcotics Anonymous,

Alcoholics Anonymous and Al Anon?

What words are shared every time our Prayer Ministry  
collects itself,

when small groups meet to plan and do  
ministry in Jesus' name,

and whenever your pastor and pastoral  
team

pray with church members and  
friends?

So when I asked our young people the clearly loaded

question,

the answer I was looking for was, of course, The Lord's Prayer.

After worship several folks spread the news that our beloved Queata Cassell

offered to her pew mates another answer

to what are the most common words lifted up at First Christian Church.

She suggested that the most frequent expression around here is, "Oops!"

Reminds us of the Bill Cosby routine,

the one about a patient on the operating table with local anesthesia

who overhears the surgeon say,  
"Sponge...scalpel...oops."

The patient exclaims, "*Did you say 'oops'?*"

*I know an 'oops' when I hear it, and what it means! Did you say 'oops' there?"*

I love it. Perfect.

Oops and the Lord's Prayer.

We goof and then we pray.

We err and stray from God's ways like lost sheep,  
and then we come crawling back home  
to prayerfully ask, seek and knock on the door  
of God's love  
for mercy and forgiveness.

We are so human, so mistake-prone,  
and yet we are so human, so well-crafted and  
beautifully made by God  
that we know our way home, we know our  
Master's voice.

We know that through the saving, redeeming love of God in  
Christ Jesus  
we may always connect with the Holy Spirit  
and reconnect with the holy in the community  
of faith.

Last Sunday we reflected on Jesus' teaching about how to  
pray and why we pray.

Persist in prayer.

Ask.

Seek.

Knock.

Knock at the door of God's grace, again and again.

Jesus of Nazareth, our Rabbi, our Messiah, taught us the Lord's Prayer

as a personal, communal expression of trust and hope.

*"Don't ask, don't get."*

He teaches us that if you don't ask those who love you for what you truly need,

starting with God and God's people,

then how can you ever expect to get and receive and be blessed with

the mercy and comfort, support and sustenance you really need?

Persist in prayer.

Pray with importunity, with trust, with all the faith and courage you can muster.

Communicate exactly what you need,

which may or may not be what you want!

Sometimes we get confused,

getting our wants and needs all up mixed.

Which brings us to today's Word for a fragmented and beautiful global village.

In the Gospel According to Luke,

Jesus Christ follows his lesson on the Lord's Prayer

with words of wisdom about what might  
distract our souls

from making the heavenly connections  
we need

in order to live into and with the  
abundance of God's grace.

The two things Jesus spoke the most about

were first the Kingdom of God

and secondly possessions.

In today's passage our treasures and the glory of heaven  
overlap.

Jesus said, *"Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of  
greed;*

*for one's life does not consist in the abundance of  
possessions."* (Luke 12: 15)

The Apostle Paul said, *"So if you have been raised with  
Christ,*

*seek the things that are above, where Christ is,*

*seated at the right hand of God.*

*2Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth,*

*3for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Col. 3: 1-3)*

When you set your minds on that which is holy,  
on that which is God-given and blessed,  
then you gain a clearer, dearer appreciation  
and understanding  
about how to approach that which is  
earthly.

In 1989, Detroit Lions rookie running back Barry Sanders signed his first contract.

Barry Sanders had been taught and practiced tithing  
while growing up in Paradise Baptist Church in  
Wichita, Kansas.

When he signed his first contract to play professional  
football,  
he remembered those lessons  
by pledging 10 percent of his \$2.5 million  
signing bonus  
to his impoverished yet proud church.

*“I was kind of awestruck when I found out,”* said the Rev.



Michael Frost,

an aircraft plant worker who also is Paradise Baptist Church's assistant pastor.

Michael Frost observed that

*“Barry's been brought up to give. I expected him to do something.*

*But nothing of this magnitude.”*

Standing on the church's front steps under a church sign

with its white paint badly blistered and peeling,

Frost said Barry Sanders has remained humble and reverent.

Pastor Frost said. *“Barry's going to be managing the millions.*

*The millions aren't going to manage Barry.”*

Who is managing your treasure? Or is your treasure managing you?

Jesus said, *“Take care!”*

Beware! Be aware!

*“You fool! This night these things you think you own are requiring your soul!”*

This morning's Word of God comes to us in the form a letter to the Colossians,

in the shape of modern narratives borne of experience,

and in the guise of a parable of Jesus.

Jesus' parables are stories that appear to bear a hidden stick of dynamite,

one with just enough explosive, gut-wrenching, life-changing power

to alter our attitudes, upend our world view,

and transform our wants, wanderings, and ways.

*15 Speaking to the people, [Jesus said],*

*“Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed.*

*Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot.”*

*16-19 Then he told them this story:*

*“The farm of a certain rich man produced a terrific crop.*

*He talked to himself: ‘What can I do? My barn isn’t big enough for this harvest.’*

*Then he said, ‘Here’s what I’ll do: I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll gather in all my grain and goods, and I’ll say to myself,*

*Self, you’ve done well! You’ve got it made and can now retire.*

*Take it easy and have the time of your life!’*

*20 “Just then God showed up and said,*

*‘You fool! This night these things you think you own are requiring your soul!’*

*21 “That’s what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not*

*with God.”*

(Luke 12: 15-21, The Message, Adapted)

“The point being made

is that this farmer’s riches are crying out for his soul.

The traditional interpretation is that the man is going to die.

Fate or God or some unusual force is demanding his soul,

saying that his time is up.

But the Greek text does not say

“This night your soul is being demanded of you.”

It says, “This night they require thy soul of thee”

– “they” referring to the many good things which the farmer thought he owned.

These things are telling the farmer what to do

so that he cannot do that which is desired by God.”

(Clarence Jordan  
and Bill Lane Doulos, P.  
63)

Where is your treasure, and what place does it hold in your life’s priorities?

Is your treasure managing your life?

Are things you think you own now owning you?

Are you managing the treasure which bless your life?

Do you feel at times that money and material things,

bills and debts and an overall lack of a sense of  
enough or self-satisfaction

distract and detract you from your spiritual,  
holistic connection

with Jesus Christ and the whole people  
of God?

Where do you see yourself in the parable?

Are we the fools to whom the parable is addressed?

Lee Roy Parnell sang, *“What kind of fool do you think I am?”*

We both know that I have played the fool many a time in my  
life.

How about you?

Are we conversing now as one fool to another?

Sometimes I am the kind of fool in clown face, a red nose and  
known as Silly Daddy,

a fool for Christ who seeks to bring out smiles and a  
moment of joy.

(Did I ever tell you about the time I was putting on a clown face in a public restroom?

I was preparing for the mission carnival at More Hands for God in downtown Atlanta.

A gentleman entered the restroom and asked, “*Are you a clown?*”

I looked in the mirror at my Twister polka dot pants, bright suspenders,

way-too-small hat, and the make-up spread out on the counter, and said to him:

*“Why, no, sir. I am a local county health inspector called in*

*because this restroom is attracting all kinds of characters.”)*

Sometimes I am the kind of fool whose enthusiasm precedes and overwhelms protocol;

I tend to make silly mistakes quickly followed by the words “Oops”

and then “I am so sorry; please forgive me.”

How about you?

Sometimes I’m the kind of fool who actually believes

that a small group of people committed to a common  
cause for the greater good

can and will and are changing the world for the  
better,

one small victory at a time.

How about you?

Sometimes I am the kind of fool whose theology of the cross  
is foolish to the world

yet wise in the eyes of God.

I actually believe that love overcomes hate,

that forgiveness reconciles relationships,

and that death shall not have the last word.

How about you?

Sometimes I am the kind of fool who testifies and tells the  
story

of our spirituality and religious practices of service  
above self.

Folks may call me a fool because these are contrary to  
worldly values and attitudes,

yet my faith informs me

this is the very foundation for living lives of  
grace and beauty.

How about you?

Sometimes I am the kind of fool whose treasure is here on  
earth,

bound up with money and material things and super  
sales

and the latest and greatest fad and trend and  
technology.

Sometimes I am the kind of fool who forgets to give from my  
heart,

and instead seeks to get what I selfishly think my  
heart desires.

Sometimes I am the kind of fool whose treasure is on earth,  
and not in heaven.

How about you?

The Good News is that God loves you, and wants you to be

connected.

So God sent Jesus and Paul and our finest spiritual guides  
and teachers

to point us to the Creator and one another,

and to point out that our treasure is not here on  
earth:

our treasure is in heaven.

Where is heaven?

Is it a castle in the clouds?

A field of lilies and bright light beyond the Milky Way?

A spiritual connection with the Christ that lives in your soul  
and in the soul of your neighbor?

From whence cometh our treasure that is heavenly?

Heaven is a moment of bliss with your beloved;

a lifetime of listening to her contented breathing;

a delightful smile on a child's face;

a brisk walk or run;

a time for conversation with your



family;  
after a holy union                      a celebratory expression  
or a life well lived.

We welcome the presence of a treasure in heaven

after accomplishing a service project or a missional  
experience;

during a shared word of grace and Good News  
with a neighbor in need;

and amidst a Great Banquet of bread and fish for a  
couple of friends,

or four or six folks,

or six billion people on earth as it is in  
heaven.

Recently at a lovely wedding in the mountains of north  
Georgia,

the Rev. Don Brewer presided and yoked a couple in  
love.

Don Brewer quoted a friend who said,

*“If you tell someone I love you, should also hand the  
person a Band Aid.”*

There is always the chance of hurt and pain in love and, if

nothing else,

you take on their suffering and bear their burdens.

Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “Undeserved suffering is redemptive.”

Love is the essence of our treasure in heaven,

and may it be at the core of our responsible caretaking  
of every treasure on earth.

Sounds kind of foolish.

And yet, somehow it sounds just about right.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the  
Holy Spirit. Amen!*