

TEAR IT DOWN  
[written in oral form]

Luke 12:13-21  
Proper 13, Year C

Gordon Allaby

The Southern, preacher and writer, Will Campbell, told this story a long time ago. It's about a hippie in Nashville, a few years after the most active period of the Civil Rights movement. He was publicly protesting on a street corner. A restaurant owner had denied him service, saying, "The law says I have to serve Black folks, but it don't say nothing about having you dirty, bearded, hippie peaceniks in my reputable establishment."

Incensed, the fellow, whom Will called "Booger Red," took to the street with a sign protesting the unfair treatment.

~~~~~

It happened that a flatbed truck pulled up, with two young Black men in the back, resting with their hats pulled down over their eyes. While they were waiting for the light to change, Booger Red approached them. "Come on fellas, the mistreatment of people continues. Come join the protest with me against this injustice."

"What's going on?" the young man asked, seeming rather uninterested.

"Oh man," Booger Red said, "They won't serve me even a hamburger because of the way I look. I need you to come demonstrate with me just as people like me demonstrated with you."

Unmoved, one of the young Black men adjusted his hat ever so slightly. As the truck began to pull away, he looked up from under the brim, and said, "Burn the damned thing down."

~~~~~

Extreme? Surprising? Radical?

~~~~~

The Gospel lesson we have read this morning captures Jesus telling a fiery parable with apocalyptic elements.

We like to think of Jesus as the kind, gentle Good Shepherd, but on many occasions, Jesus was terse and confrontational.

In this passage, Jesus is a brazen, radical agitator.

~~~~~

Someone from the crowd, approached and asked Jesus to settle a dispute with his older brother. He wanted a share of the inheritance, but the executor, his older brother, would not give him any.

Respected teachers were empowered to resolve such legal matters; however, Jesus saw that the lust for money was tearing that family apart, and refused to intervene.

He warns the man,...and everyone listening,..."Take heed!

Be on guard against all kinds of greed."

Be on guard: defend against it. Fight against greed.

Then the profound statement: "One's life does NOT consist in the abundance of possessions" / in wealth.

Life is not about luxuries, financial riches and consumer indulgences.

~~~~~  
Then Jesus told a parable.

It begins with a rich landowner. This character immediately plunges us into the political world of both the ancient text and Our context.

Land ownership and wealth, and the ability of common people to access it is a defining issue of justice in every era.

Those who "have" get more, and those who don't get less.

~~~~~  
It is not by accident of course, that the "Leader of the Free World," who is hell-bent on becoming the most noxious person ever to hold that office, and possibly also the last one, is a real estate developer.

And,...an especially sleazy one at that. He takes advantage of people, and brags about his exploits.

He does Not appeal to our better angels, as one former president said.

But,.. one could hardly find a more fitting figurehead for the legacy of the American Empire... and add to that, Western capitalism.

I do think that Jesus would align more closely to Karl Marx than Adam Smith, particularly in regards to primitive accumulation.

~~~~~  
This parable is a condemnation on the rich / those who hoard wealth.

This is not a critique on making a living.

Accumulating wealth--hoarding--deprives the poor of resources and keeps them poor.

Moreover, wealth brings power and buys political power. So, the affluent control the system, even altering it to make themselves even more rich.

Take for example the recent changes to OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program). Those in need now get less help and fewer services. As a consolation, tuition was reduced by 10%, yet there is still a net loss. However, the rich, who didn't even qualify for government assistance, get a big bonus with the tuition reduction.

Shameful!

The changes are a money grab by the rich and powerful.

Tax cuts aligned with reductions in social services are a scheme to enhance the coffers of the affluent.

Beware when politicians promise tax cuts!

~~~~~  
In addition, as we all know, the trickle-down theory is a scam.

It is another charade that helps the rich get richer, ...period.

And, income disparity tears at the foundation of democracy and makes the deprived angry and fearful.

~~~~~  
The Rich Landowner, in the parable, faced a dilemma.

His harvest was very bountiful, it was more than he anticipated.

He could have given it away...because he did Not need more wealth.  
He could have consulted with others, or even with God.  
Instead, he consults himself. He has a conversation with himself.  
(Does that remind you of a certain political leader?)

~~~~~  
He determines that he will tear down his barn for a bigger one.  
Yet, that very night, his life is demanded of him. He died.  
He didn't die because tearing the building down was the wrong move.

It was precisely the right move.  
I think if he would have asked Jesus, Jesus would have responded just as the black man did to Booger Red, "Burn the damned thing down."

Destroying the barn was the right move because its storage of wealth was depriving others. The lust to hoard was an abomination.  
The rich man's strategy to hoard more was greedy and cruel.  
For Jesus, the tearing down is the point.  
For Jesus, the extractive economy has to be destroyed.  
For Jesus, doing justice: helping the poor and needy is essential, and that includes giving away the excess.

~~~~~  
Tearing down is a common theme with Jesus.

In John 2, Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it back."

His mother Mary, in Luke 1, sang about Jesus:  
He has **trn down** the powerful from their thrones,  
And lifted up the lowly.  
He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty."

This radical, revolutionary message is part of the Gospel, and it inescapable.

~~~~~  
The rich man was consumed with greed; he was addicted to hoarding.

God called him a Fool!                      He was a Fool!

~~~~~  
He lived to accumulate wealth so he could retire relaxing, eating drinking and being merry. His pursuit stole from others, and ended with his relatives fighting over his estate.

We all know, that money does not buy happiness, Yet...we do very little to resist our culture's appetite for consuming and hoarding.  
In many ways we are a part of it, such as cheering on millionaire athletes.

Alberta's Crown corporation owns shares in the Geo Group, and until recently, so did Ontario's Teachers' Pension plan.

The Geo Group is an American company making millions from for-profit prisons and housing the divided refugee families by the Mexican border.

Those desperate refugees are the result of large American corporations who, through force and corruption, stole farm land in Central America. The local farmers were left without land, and their options were to work for next to nothing on the huge corporate farms or flee to another place in order to feed their families. And, we get cheap bananas and other produce.

We dare not be smug; there are numerous international Canadian companies that behave very poorly.

~~~~~  
Moreover, in addition to our own consumerism, we too often put our faith in money. Even churches frequently make ministry decision based on affordability. Instead of trusting God to provide, churches make sure they don't risk their financially stable position.

No doubt, we do value justice. We do help those in need, and this is good and wonderful, but not enough. Those gestures are like recycling plastic and driving a gas propelled car a few less kilometres a week.

The System must be changed! The System must be changed!

The Climate Crisis is the perfect example, and is much like the hoarding and the pursuit of wealth.

Our patterns / our culture and our choices are killing us.

They are NOT life giving, and we humans keep repeating the same mistakes. We keep pursuing wealth. It is insanity, which has been defined as, "repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results.

People want to make lots of money, so oil continues to be extracted, and our government still supports it. Yet, wealth will not bring us joy or what we really need, and subsequently, we are killing ourselves.

~~~~~  
Then, we wonder why people are turning away from the church, especially young adults.

~~~~~  
Young adults and millennials see the hypocrisy in society. They see the inaction on the climate crisis. They see a system titled against them. They can't afford housing. They feel betrayed. They are losing hope. And, what do they see in the church? What do they see from the church?

~~~~~  
Because of our exploitive culture that benefits the rich, more and more people are falling behind. Not long ago, CBC reported that 40% of Canadians are \$200 away from insolvency each and every month.

Holding on by a fraying rope breeds fear, anxiety and anger, and that is the fodder for populists.  
We know who those leaders are by their big promises and their venom that enflames bigotry, fear and more anger.

~~~~~  
We the church must endeavor to burn down the corrupt system.  
Tear it down.  
We must tear down our investment / our faith in money.  
We must work to tear down tyrants. We must fight injustice, and fight for income parity.  
We must do more for the poor and exploited.

We, the church, must truly be as Christ in the world.  
~~~~~  
The parable ends by telling us how; it is by being rich towards God.  
Our faith must be completely in God.  
Our lives must be for God and with God, doing and living as Jesus did.

Therefore, we must, as Mary proclaimed:  
Tear down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lift up the lowly.  
We must fill the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.  
There is a bit of Robin hood in that.

~~~~~  
In addition, our committed and complete faith in God will radiate hope.

The world desperately needs hope. Young adults need hope.  
When people have hope, the populist tyrants will look foolish.

Hope!  
~~~~~  
When you go home, continue reading in Luke 12.  
The rest of the message is about hope. It is the passage that declares:  
"Do Not Worry about your life"  
"Consider the lilies"  
God will clothe us / give us our needs. God will provide.

~~~~~  
We must trust this to be true.  
We must live this faith, and radiate our hope for all.

**This likely means that we must change.**  
As Mahatma Gandhi said, "Be the change that you wish to see in the world.

Tear down the old, and be the change.

To continue in our same old pattern is Insanity.

[Excerpts and Will Campbell story are from Greg Jarell, June 2019]