

Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” “But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” “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.” “Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ “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. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ 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?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

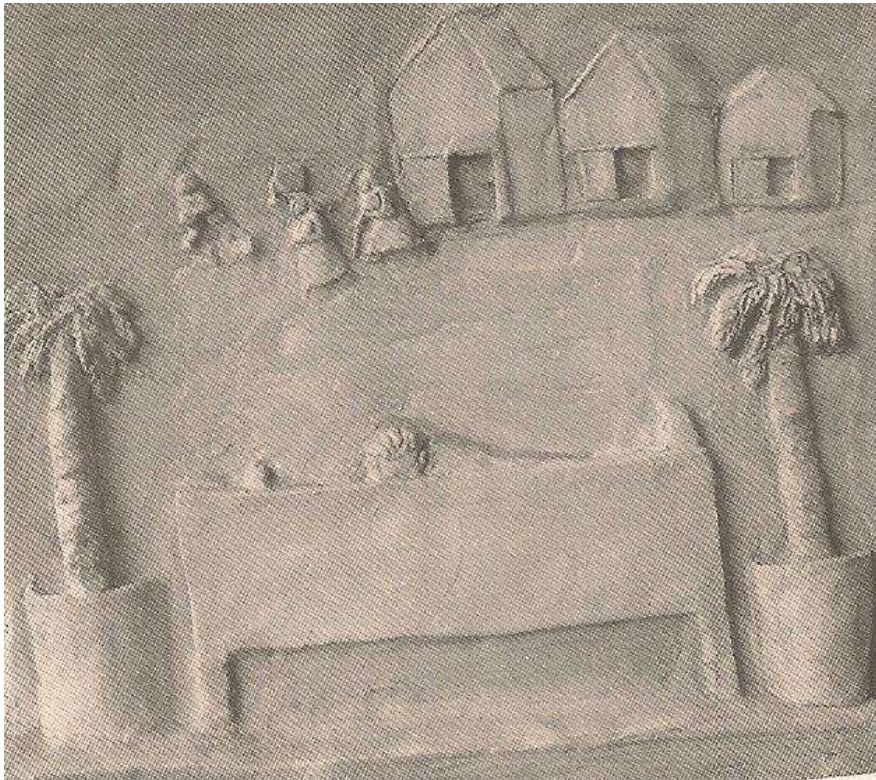
‘Becoming Rich Toward God’

Self-centeredness and greed fueled the innermost thoughts of the rich man’s soliloquy. I, I, I, I, I, I and my, my, my, my, filled his dissatisfied ego with thoughts of needing more. In his two sided clay relief of Jesus’ parable, theologian Charles McCollough imaged the foolishness of the rich farmer. ‘On one side is a close up of the satisfied face of the rich farmer day-dreaming in his soliloquy. He dreams of taking his ease in a hammock strung between two palm trees. He holds up a drink, even as he plans to build bigger barns to secure his wealth and future comfort, because of his abundant crop. Behind his head near the envisioned barns are the haunting images of the poor, which he does not see’ (New Image).



“Take care!” Jesus warned. “Be on guard against all kinds of greed, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15).

On side two of the relief, he lies in a coffin, which echoes the hammock. Two potted plants stand in for the natural palms that held his hammock on side one. The figures of the poor can be seen emptying the barns, illustrating the stern irony and foolishness of ignoring the poor while securing one's own wealth and comfort.



The definition of fool in the Bible is one who, in practice, denies the existence of God. This rich fool had Eased-God-Out by not factoring into his financial considerations either the Law of Moses (against coveting and idolatry) or the prophet's message to do justice and take care of the poor. McCollough noted: In the early Jewish tradition, as with Joseph in Egypt, abundant crops were seen as gifts from God to be 'harvests for the poor'. Indeed, there is the suggestion that the phrase "your soul will be

demand of you" means that a debt is called in, as in the collecting of a loan. Thus, it is the poor (God's special people who are calling in, if not this man's soul, at least some of his abundance.) Following this line of economic-political interpretation, the parable goes beyond the private warning not to be greedy and not to count on taking it with you. Rather, it considers the whole economy of wealth, prosperity, and poverty, and suggests that greed is not just a private vice, but a public problem needing public solutions---for example, laws of inheritance and tax policies that limit the concentration of wealth, especially when it squeezes out the poor (Art of Parables, p. 74)

In 'On Earth As in Heaven: Justice Rooted Spirituality,' Arthur Paul Boers wrote. 'As Christians we are called to a relationship with God by 'deriving from God our purpose, identity, direction, and self-esteem. Rather than asking the self-centered question, "What is God's will for my life?" we are empowered to ask bigger questions, such as, "How can I fit into the work of God's kingdom here on earth?"' (Sojourners, Aug. 2007, p. 48)

I like the rich farmer parable because it reminds me to reframe selfish Me, Myself, and My questions, by replacing 'I' with social pronouns like 'our' and 'we'. So, for example, instead of getting stuck in a question like, 'What is the best health care plan for me?' I remember to ask the larger one: "How can we (as a society) provide health care for everyone?" I also like the parable because it reminds me of Love's generous Spirit that takes care of creation, not by anxious and greedy acquisition, but rather by a just sharing of resources. So that when we ask questions like: "How can we halt global warming?" "How can we farm to sustain the integrity of the land?" "How can we trade fairly?" "How can we close the huge gap between the rich and poor?" we have faith that in our togetherness with the Lord, the world will once again discover Love's fire.

Prayer.

Our Father. . . thy kingdom come, thy will be done. Amen