

Daily we struggle with many decisions regarding the proper use of possessions, things, stuff, blessings, and opportunities. How do you decide what to keep? What to share? What is necessary and what is icing on top of the cake? What are your priorities, and do you wonder if you are on the right track? Is it enough? Is it ever enough?

For some reason one of the first objects of attention when I began taking pictures was old barns. There was something about the different sizes and shapes and how they aged that captured my imagination. I wonder who had first built them and how long it had taken. Did they replace smaller ones and how could some of them even stand up despite their obvious age and abandonment. That leads me to this parable of Jesus.

His parables are often more humorous than we realize. For instance, why was this farmer surprised at his harvest? It sounds as if he always did well and had many barns already. Why, then, is there so much confusion about what to do with harvest? Is he bragging or really that concerned? Of all things possible, he seemed so fearful of not keeping everything he tore down every barn to build bigger and more modern ones. And what do you think happened to his harvest as it lay in the fields waiting for new barns to be built? Right! It would rot.

I do not believe this parable is an indictment of wealth, abundance, or success. But it certainly is a criticism concerning our response to such blessings of God. What options in this scenario were not even considered by this greedy, self-absorbed farmer? Were there other farmers whose crops had failed and whose children were hungry. Were there villages that had endured famine where even a little gift would go a long way? Had he considered that maybe next year he should plant fewer crops or sell such rich farmland to others so he would be better able to deal with any abundance. Might he have hired more help and taught others how to be successful? Why, of all possibilities, would he be uncertain of what to do with his success, or keep more than he could ever use or need?

To really get at the heart of the parable, wasn't he being selfish and misusing with what really wasn't his in the first place? Where does the soil, rain, sunlight, and seeds come from if not from God? So, whose harvest is it after all, if not God's? Now, we begin to see what Jesus was saying.

This reminds me of a photo I saw as a child. There was a gorilla in a zoo with arms so stuffed with food that he couldn't eat for fear of dropping a single piece of food. So, he had gathered all the food so no other gorillas got any. He sat there in the corner of his cage, alone and afraid to eat for fear of another gorilla getting some of his food even though it was more than any one gorilla could eat. Eventually he would starve due to selfishness even as he was surrounded by food. Just like this farmer!

How much of what we do is like that? We spend our entire lives gathering abundance for the future, but the cocoon of death always comes. How many assume parents and grandparents should keep everything intact for an inheritance rather than encouraging them to use what they have gathered, for themselves and others, now? Why do we so love to criticize others who have

more than we do, while forgetting that we often are seen as the wealthy by others who have less than we?

We complain when we don't have enough but often hoard when we have too much. We forget God fits into the equation, somehow, and every moment of life is a gift, every gift is an opportunity, and we are constantly harvesting what is all a blessing from a loving God.

That is a major point of this parable. Sometimes we get so busy with things we forget the most important thing which is our love for God and neighbor. It isn't that we aren't hard workers but there are moments when we are tempted to be too preoccupied with me and my stuff.

That is point of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It is in surrender and sacrificial love rather than hoarding and hiding, that tombs become empty, and death becomes life! Jesus spent his entire life emptying himself, proclaiming that even when there was nothing more to give and he surrendered to death, his power enabled a more beautiful creation than the first to emerge from that tomb.

One of the treasures in our general community is a place called Meijer Gardens. (And my disclaimer is that I do not have Meijer stock.) Every spring there is a display in the green house there of chrysalises, cocoons, and emerging butterflies. It is amazing to see such a miracle of life. A caterpillar that does not surrender itself into a cocoon is a wasted life. No matter how much it eats or stores, without that surrender there will not be the new life of a butterfly. In a perfect way, it was through Jesus' sacrifice for us, and his surrender in a tomb, that the dazzling and beautiful wings of Easter emerged, and our lives are changed forever.

We are called to a different kind of living than the world might embrace. We live not to hoard but to surrender. Not to be served but to serve. Not to keep but to share. It is in a willingness to surrender, share and serve (as Jesus has done for us) that we do become a Light to the World.

What do I really need, and how am I blessed for service? Why would I ever be surprised by blessing, ignore an opportunity, or think that everything is about me alone? A butterfly can't fly if it weighs itself down with stuff. And neither can we! There is no sin in wealth or poverty, but only in the reluctance to share blessings and opportunities.

A traveling art display, called "Treasures of the Vatican," contained priceless manuscripts, golden goblets, jeweled crowns, incredible art and statues. It is wonderful such valuable gifts have been preserved, but the irony is earthly rather than heavenly treasures get so much attention. But the bigger point is the real treasure of the Vatican should be a risen Christ, rather than silver and gold. The lesson is simply that even the Church wrestles with the reason Jesus told the parable in the first place!

Here is a new parable for you to write. It goes like this: "The life of **(add your name)** produced abundantly, and your one question is: "What will I do with the life, the opportunities, and the blessings that I call "mine?"

How will we finish the parable by how we live each day? Remember, it is all about barns, butterflies, and blessings! Now ... it is up to each of us to write our ending to the parable.