

8.28.22 – Pentecost 12
“The Foolishness of Greed”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Genesis 4:1-6 (NLT) ~ Pam

¹ Now Adam had sexual relations with his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant. When she gave birth to Cain, she said, “With the Lord’s help, I have produced a man!”² Later she gave birth to his brother and named him Abel.

When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground.³ When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the Lord.⁴ Abel also brought a gift—the best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The Lord accepted Abel and his gift,⁵ but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.

⁶ “Why are you so angry?” the Lord asked Cain. “Why do you look so dejected?”⁷ You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”

⁸ One day Cain suggested to his brother, “Let’s go out into the fields.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him.

⁹ Afterward the Lord asked Cain, “Where is your brother? Where is Abel?” “I don’t know,” Cain responded. “Am I my brother’s guardian?”

¹⁰ But the Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground!”¹¹ Now you are cursed and banished from the ground, which has swallowed your brother’s blood.¹² No longer will the ground yield good crops for you, no matter how hard you work! From now on you will be a homeless wanderer on the earth.”

¹³ Cain replied to the Lord, “My punishment is too great for me to bear!”¹⁴ You have banished me from the land and from your presence; you have made me a homeless wanderer. Anyone who finds me will kill me!”

¹⁵ The Lord replied, “No, for I will give a sevenfold punishment to anyone who kills you.” Then the Lord put a mark on Cain to warn anyone who might try to kill him.¹⁶ So Cain left the Lord’s presence and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

L: These are the Earliest Words of God. C: Thanks be to God!

Luke 12:13-21 (NLT) ~ Pam

Parable of the Rich Fool

¹³ Then someone called from the crowd, “Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father’s estate with me.”

¹⁴ Jesus replied, “Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?”¹⁵ Then he said, “Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.”

¹⁶ Then he told them a story: “A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops.¹⁷ He said to himself, ‘What should I do? I don’t have room for all my

crops.’¹⁸ Then he said, ‘I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods.’¹⁹ And I’ll sit back and say to myself, “My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!”

²⁰ “But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?’

²¹ “Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”

Leader: These are Instructive Words from Jesus. **People: Thanks be to God!**

Please pray with me:

Creator God, these are tougher stories than we’ve heard so far, so please help us to understand the meaning. Thank you for our time together yesterday and today. May we remember how important our relationship with you is, and that no amount of human or earthly provision can equal the abundant life you provide if we trust and obey you. Let us hear this week’s message of confession and reflection, listening for the goodness of eternal riches. Guide our ears and minds as we listen and speak about the dangers of greed. Amen.

Thank you again to our ABBE landscaping team who worked very hard on Wednesday in the heat to trim our trees on the Burger King side of Columbia Pike, the large holly bush on the hill, and the bamboo blocking our sign. You may wonder, what does ABBE mean? Stands for the first initials of our team members. Your volunteering, consistent attention to our property not only saves the church money, but your motivation to protect the property from parties and to open the sight lines to the church is inspiring. *You are listening for the work!* How can we be evangelistic to share the glory of the kingdom of God with our community if the church building itself models an unwelcoming facade? Your efforts demonstrate the generous fruit of the spirit and the stewardship principle of giving time, tithes, and talents to God. As we begin the hard work of building our 2023 budget guideline, to be voted on in October, please keep our entire leadership and volunteer efforts in prayer.

As the Holy Spirit leads my sermon and Scripture planning several months out, I had no idea this topic would fall in a week and month when our inflated economy would experience such a volatile stock market. As I shared at our breakfast yesterday, most people have a Scarcity Mentality script running in their heads; we've survived more than one recession, and some of you saw your parents' and grandparents' lives affected by the years following the 1929 Great Depression. These are triggers that can send us into "hunker down" mode, and stifle generous clear thinking. It is no wonder that God's world of Abundance and Provision are harder to remember. If our faith in God and spiritual practices are strong, there is no room in our kingdom-focused lives for either worry or fear. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says in Matthew 6:25-34:

. . . do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? . . . [*ed., or the lilies of the field, God clothes them in beauty*]³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

So, it *might* be said that greed and foolishness got our economy where it is today. Let us explore what these two accounts can teach us and what we can teach others. What is "greed" in the context of our two passages? How about foolishness"? Merriam-Webster dictionary defines greed as "a selfish and excessive desire for more of something (such as money) than is needed." There is no specific definition in the Bible, but Biblical history and parables illustrate the dangers of greed throughout. "Foolishness" is defined as: "lack of good sense or judgment; stupidity." I

suggest that both Cain and the main character in the parable are foolish and greedy. Although we don't have enough time to deeply analyze the Genesis passage today, let's refresh our memories.

Cain was the first child born to Adam and Eve after they fled the Garden. He was the child of hope and mentioned thirteen times in our passage! He worked the soil but had a general lack of faith. Abel was only mentioned seven times, tended the flock of sheep, and loved God. Cain was jealous of Abel when God accepted Abel's flesh offering and rejected Cain's produce offering, although both were first fruits. Scripture never tells us why God judged Cain more harshly, just that Cain's reaction was to eliminate the object of his jealousy – to murder Abel in cold blood in a distant field. Coaxing Abel into a distant field meant there would be no observers or law enforcement, yet of course, God saw everything and questioned Cain. Rather than confess this horrible sin and seek God's forgiveness, Cain lies. So, God condemns Cain to a life of wandering, but does **not** abandon him; rather he gives him a sign. The meaning of the mark has been twisted to suit mankind's interpretation: "the mark that God set upon Cain now refers to a person's sinful nature, wickedness, and estrangement from god" some say, but online and academic sources concur that the tattoo was actually a sign of God's **mercy** and **protection**. By that mark, he could not be killed for his wrongdoing. God still loved him. Even his foolishness and greedy heart were loved. Cain did not wander as God instructed but lived the rest of his life in Nod (which means literally "wandering"), east of Eden.

We come to Jesus' parable of The Rich Fool in Luke 12. Land inheritance division was requested of Jesus because rabbis often mediated

these legal affairs; however, Jesus refused to arbitrate. Who made me judge? The accepted standard of value needed to be sorted. Instead, Jesus reminded the hearers and disciples that wealth and personal property were not true measures of a person's life. He instructs them to avoid the tyranny of things and to guard against the sin of greed. Greed encompasses other things like lifestyle, prestige, education, as well as belongings. The foolish rich man kept planting so much that he needed to build more barns to store his crops, rather than give some away to others in need! Was he gathering more for his own foolish greed or to pass on to his heirs? Possessions demand more of our time and energy, taking it away from our relationship with God. Possessions often demand more of our resources to pay for storage, even today! Is that wisdom or Kingdom living? Wherever you drive, you see storage units; as entitled as our youth seem, we were the ones who built these barns. Oh, you foolish one; your life will be demanded of you this night. Let us join in the trending wisdom movement to minimize or right size our belongings and homes.

How does this apply to you individually? To us as a group? To our church? Are we being good stewards of the dusty old furnishings and books of our past? Or are we hanging on, worrying or being fearful about the future of this church? I know these thoughts come up occasionally. Can we agree to be wiser with our "stuff"? Let us reconnect with God and be rich toward Him: ⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that . . . ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Tim. 6:6-10 ^{NIV})." There are other

parables in Luke 16 that deal with the danger of wealth. Wealth by itself is indeed a blessing and many can be helped. It is our focus that makes us foolish or wise. Riches or property can become idols to worship, rather than God. Be wise, not foolish as we check our motivations and actions as by living in community together and building next year's Vision Plan for ministry and stewardship. Be rich in the Lord's blessings, and may the Holy Spirit be our guide, as we continue to listen for the work God is encouraging us toward, committing our time, tithes, and talents. Amen! //

Will you pray with me? Lord, thank you for this reminder that you are the giver of all things. Help us to be better stewards of your gifts, our time, tithes, and talents. May we discern by prayer and listening first, then serve by doing. Make us more gracious and wiser to fulfill our many ministries. Let us keep building our loving relationship with you and others who need to know you. Help us to share the Gospel in our doing and being. In Jesus' name we pray, **Amen.**