

What Kind of Fool?

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1 Corinthians 4

[9] ... we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.

[10] We are fools for Christ's sake

2 Corinthians 8

[9] For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

Colossians 3

[1] If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

[2] Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Luke 12

[20] But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

[21] So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God Our Father and Our Lord and Savior, Jesus The Christ. Amen.

Remember Frank Sinatra's classic song, (sing) "What kind of fool am I, who never fell in love?"

Remember Fred Sanford who thought his sister-in-law was crazy? Remember how she would often point her finger at him and exclaim, "You old fool!"

Remember the Apostle Paul once exclaimed, "We are fools for Christ's sake ..."

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And remember the rich farmer in today's Gospel who thought he had all he needed to relax and take it easy. God calls him a fool.

The question, then, this morning, is: What kind of fool are you? Am I? Would we want to be known as rich fools? Or do we want to be known as fools for Christ? What kind of fool shall we be?

We get to choose. Our disposition toward possessions answers the question.

In the Broadway play, "A Raisin in the Sun", a young man imbued with modern ideas voiced a lament that would have made the Madison Avenue boys strut with pride. He cried: "I want so many things, it drives me crazy Money is life!" His old-fashioned mother, sad and perplexed, replied, "You can't be satisfied, can you! How different we've become!"

But are we so different? Or have there not always been people like the fellow in today's Gospel who comes to Jesus - people who are able to see only material things and completely forget there is anything else! Of course, they are as senseless as the woman on a ship which had lost its rudder in a high sea. She consoled the captain by saying, "Never mind. It was down there where nobody could see it anyway. It won't make any difference." To be concerned only over the things which are seen and to ignore the things which are not seen is to drift aimlessly without a rudder.

Elsie and I once visited Koinonia Farm, near Americus, Georgia. It is a Christian commune of about 50 people who live, work, study and fellowship together on a 1,400-acre tract of land located about 120 miles due south of Atlanta and 10 miles east of Plains. Founded by farmer-Ph.D.-in Greek New Testament scholar Clarence Jordan in 1942, it is one of the most successful Christian cooperative farms in the world. Amish and Mennonite and Quaker groups have frequently sent delegations there to study their farming techniques and to observe their Christian lifestyles. From the beginning, the people at Koinonia have attempted to follow quite literally the descriptions of the New Testament regarding how the earliest Christians lived. And one of the requirements of anyone who wishes to join Koinonia is that he or she dispose of their earthly possessions before coming. This sets the scene for the following story:

An old black jalopy shuddered into the driveway of Koinonia Farm, coughed to a halt, and delivered a quiet, 40-year-old spinster who asked if she could remain for a visit. For two or three days she thoughtfully observed and absorbed life at Koinonia, and then she approached Clarence and revealed an interest in joining the group. He encouraged her and explained in detail what Koinonia was striving to be, how one must surrender himself totally to Christ,

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including all his earthly possessions. At Koinonia, he said, this is achieved by asking everyone to enter the fellowship in a common condition known as “flat broke”. Her eyebrows jerked upward a fraction of an inch in alarm, and quite cautiously she began to ask questions.

Clarence was perplexed. “I couldn’t understand it,” he said. “As poor as she looked, I was really surprised. Jesus said it would be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom, but we’d never even had one apply at our place. She was really quite agitated.”

He asked her what difficulty there would be with relinquishing her possessions. She had a fair-size difficulty, somewhere between \$80,000 and \$90,000. Clarence swallowed two or three times and then reasserted that she would have to dispose of the money to become a part of Koinonia. “How,” she asked? “Give it to the poor,” he said, “Give it to your relatives, throw it over a bridge, but you must enter the fellowship without it.” “What about giving it to Koinonia Farm,” she asked?

Clarence grinned, and replied: “No. If you put that money in here several things would happen. First of all, we’d quit growing peanuts and start discussing theology. That wouldn’t be a healthy condition for us. And in the next place, unless I miss my guess, you are a very lonely person, and you are lonely because you think every friend you ever had is after your money.” She confirmed that judgment.

“Well,” Clarence continued, “If you put that money in here, you would think we courted you for your money, that we loved you for your money. And in the next place, if you put that money in here you would get the idea you were God’s guardian angel, that you endowed the rest of us, and that all of us ought to be grateful to you for your beneficence.”

She was listening; Clarence pressed his point: “Now for your sake and for our sakes, you get rid of that money and come walk this way with us.” Tearfully, the woman replied: “I can’t do it.” She packed her old car and left.

Now, quite obviously, you and I are not in such a situation of having to decide whether to do away with all our earthly possessions. Most, if not all, of us plan to hang on to quite a few earthly possessions. And today’s Gospel is not suggesting that we get rid of all our earthly possessions. Rather, it is providing us a loving, sobering, strong reminder that our true richness is in God. And as we recognize that and believe that, the things of this world lose their grip on us and we are freed to offer ourselves, our time and our possessions - and ever-increasing amounts of them - to God. Even as he has offered himself totally and completely for us through Jesus Christ Our Lord.

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You know, it is said that Alexander the Great gave instructions that when he died his body should be placed in the coffin in such a way that his hands were visible so that it should be seen that his hands were open - and empty. The conqueror of the world was well aware that he could take none of his conquest with him. A person can try - like the fellow in today's Gospel - to live today with what he has, and get more and more of it, but he faces tomorrow only with what he is.

And who are we? We are God's children, the ones redeemed by the Lamb! And therein is our true and only wealth. And because of that, we can understand why David Livingston said, "I set no value on anything, except in relation to the cause of Christ." We can also understand why John D. Rockefeller once said, "As I study wealthy men, I can see but one way in which they can secure a real equivalent for money spent, and that is to cultivate a taste for giving where their money may produce an effect which will be a lasting gratification." Those who are aware that their true richness lies in God become masters at the art of giving.

Gordon Cosby, founding pastor of the Church of the Savior in Washington, D. C., was once pastor of a small Baptist church outside Lynchburg, Virginia. While there one day a deacon shared a concern with him. It seems there was a very poor widow in their church with six children. The deacons discovered she was giving \$4.00 a month to the church - a tithe of her total income. She was so poverty-stricken that the deacons felt she couldn't afford to give even this much. They had decided the pastor should call on her and assure her that they felt that she was under no obligation to give anything to the church. They understood her impoverished circumstances and wanted to relieve her of this obligation.

Cosby finishes the story: "I am not wise now", he writes, "I was less wise then. I went and told her of the concern of the deacons. I told her as graciously and as supportively as I knew how that she was relieved of the responsibility of giving. As I talked with her... tears came to her eyes." "I want to tell you," she said, "That you are taking away the last thing that gives my life dignity and meaning."

So is the one whose richness is in God.

We own many things. Some of us own so many things we rent storage units to store them. We are reluctant to let go of things. Resistant to change our priorities. We know deep down we will one day have to let everything go, but we so often want to hold on for dear life now, for as long as we can. What kind of fool are we? People are dying every day, every night and many suddenly, unexpectedly. And many are under 60 and more than a few are under 50 and likewise, more than a few under 40. And not a one is carried to the cemetery in a hearse

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pulling a U-Haul trailer.

What would happen in this world if all the Christians in the United States started to tithe?

Right now, less than 2% of all Christians in the U.S. tithe. Do you think Paul's phrase, "Fools for Christ" might make the front cover of Time magazine?

Aesop told the story that once upon a time there was a Miser who used to hide his gold at the foot of a tree in his garden; but every week he used to go and dig it up and gloat over his gains. A robber, who had noticed this, went and dug up the gold and ran off with it. When the Miser next came to gloat over his treasures, he found nothing but the empty hole. He tore his hair and raised such an outcry that all the neighbors came around him, and he told them how he used to come and visit his gold. "Did you ever take any of it out?" asked one of them. "Nay," said he, "I only came to look at it." "Then come again and look at the hole," said a neighbor; "it will do you just as much good." Wealth unused might as well not exist.

Do we have accumulated wealth we don't use and don't need to use?

Could any of it be given to Christ now? An example would be a paid-up life insurance policy whose surrender value you could very well give to Christ for his work in and through Hill Avenue Grace now, which you and your heirs could very easily live without. Or maybe some stock you could sell and not miss. Or some land you own and could donate.

Would we want to be known as rich fools? Or do we want to be known as fools for Christ?

What kind of fool will it be? We get to choose.

St. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 8:

[9] For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

Fools for Christ recognize that our riches are in the things that are above. And that the things of this earth are for giving away, not hoarding. Would we want to be known as rich fools? Or do we want to be known as fools for Christ? We get to choose. What kind of fool?

Amen.

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