

Our readings today are very rich. (pause expectantly)

And that was a joke that my husband tried to warn me would not land. Very RICH texts? Because all of our texts are about the perils of riches, amassing wealth. Get it? Okay, moving on.

Like I was saying (in a very hilarious way), each of these texts warns about focusing too much on earthly things. It's the "too much" part that is key here. For all of our texts warn and lament those who focus on gaining earthly things *in excess*. Even more as if those things provide some guarantee.

In our gospel, Jesus describes a realistic scenario: a rich farmer's land produced a surplus he cannot possibly eat. He stores it so he can sell it later, when there's less grain available and the price goes up. A technically legal but greedy business practice. We can contrast this with the feeding of the 5,000, where what's barely enough is all given away, and that is the source of abundance. Or think back to the story of Joseph in Genesis. In a dream, God tells Joseph a famine will come. That he should help Pharaoh use the interim years to store away a certain percentage of each harvest and then build cisterns to store up the grain. The exact situation in the parable. Pharaoh listens to Joseph. The famine comes. The people of Egypt do not go hungry. And neither do those outside of Egypt. Instead they come to Egypt and ask for help. And, under Joseph's leadership, they are fed. Including Joseph's estranged brothers. Through this generosity, Joseph and his family are reconnected and reconciled. And so the moral of this parable is not shocking: whatever resources you have, instead of amassing more than you need, practice gratitude to God and consider the well-being of the vulnerable.

But the thing that makes a parable a parable – what separates it from any other moral story – is that it shocks us into paying attention.

This unexpected outcome could perhaps change a greedy person's heart (think Mr. Scrooge), but for most of us it likely reinforces what we already think: Greed is bad. The ever-widening gap between the wealthy and poor is not God's dream. Right?

Yeah, so that's the thing: the sign of a parable is that it shocks *everyone* in some way. Stirs up something inside of each person. In me. And in you. God knows we need and deserve more from our sacred stories than to only have the beliefs we already hold affirmed.

We live in a world that emphasizes overfunctioning and putting yourself first. For some people, this feels rewarding. For others, it feels like a requirement for survival. Whether reward or requirement, this way of living tears apart connection. We are tired. Overwhelmed. More and more in our own head and our own world just trying to make it through. And whether we do this frantically or with a kind of tuned-out dullness, all the while, we're looking for something that will assure us that, in the end, it will all be okay.

Will everything turn out okay? *That* is the focus of the parable. It is the longing that drives the rich farmer and the brother who wants his inheritance, and the disciples in the next few verses who worry about what they'll eat and wear. I have this longing. Do you? Part of me sees the rich farmer's greed. But another part feels his relief. It is all going to be okay. You can let go of the worry. The vigilance. Start focusing on the things that really matter, that you've always wanted to do. Exhaling, when you didn't even know you were holding your breath.

It's hard to get that with our translation, which reads: Then I'll say to myself: You have blessings in reserve for many years to come. Relax! Eat, drink and be merry!

If you remember nothing else from this sermon, remember this: "relax" is a very, very bad translation. The Greek word here is better translated as rest. It's used in the Book of Revelation to assure John that those who have died are not dead, but are resting and will awaken in God's glory. It's the word used to describe Jesus' time away from the crowds as well as when the disciples fall asleep while he is praying in the garden of Gethsemane. This word has to do with deep rest that relieves. Peace that passes understanding. Perhaps the fullest expression of this word comes from Matthew 11:28, when Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you [pause]...rest."

The rich farmer does not do what he does so he can charter a jet to a private island to relax. Or maybe he does and it's ironic blasphemy, but since I don't think any of you own your own island, let's err on the side that the rich farmer shares our longing for rest from the fears and worries of life. That he does what he does believing that he will be able to rest, to be at peace. Finally.

And so, like I said, I'm right there with the rich farmer, letting myself believe this could be true and within arm's reach. Followed by the feeling of shock when the rich farmer dies and everything is very much not okay.

Shock leads us to retrace our steps. How did we get here? In my retracing, I notice how isolated the rich farmer is; how his longing led to decisions that left him more and more alone. He only talks with himself throughout the parable. He does not reach out to his community. We don't even know if he has one. And he does not reach out to God. Not to give thanks for the harvest. Not to consider how to use the excess. Not to name his own longing. Such that he speaks words of comfort to himself: "Then I'll say to myself..." The reflexive – I'll say to myself – can also be translated as "then I will say to my soul." Then I will say to my soul, you can rest.

And while we must be able to draw strength and wisdom from within ourselves, and to love ourselves, we are not meant to live our lives – in our work or in our rest – in isolation. That is what sin is: that which separates us from the love of God and from our neighbor. The parable does not dismiss our longing for things to be okay; it seeks to direct this longing, to direct us, to the true source of rest and liberation and love.

It is God who gives rest and shows us how to rest, not when life eventually works out but in the meantime and even when it does not. This rest helps us develop an inner life where God's love for us can dwell. Without it, our world, and even our best intentions, will consume us. When I reject rest, even if it's to fight injustice, that resistance becomes its own misdirected and isolating barrier. It separates me from God's love. Ultimately, your witness to God's love comes from your experience of that love. Because it healed you. Nurtured you. Brought you back to who you are: God's very own. Throughout our lives, we draw on this love and then, like Christ, we give it away, knowing it is endlessly abundant. God wants this for each of us, not just because it helps

change the world (although it does!), but because God loves us. For that is God's deepest longing: to love us.

Let yourself notice: Where is there bounty in my life? What do I have in abundance? How does that make me feel: Strong? Thankful? Worried? Tired? Is it something I can store up? Is it something I can share with others? Which am I doing right now? What's the hope or fear behind that?

How do I think about rest? What kind of rest do I dream of? Can I even imagine it? What would I do to feel that kind of rest? Does it take me closer or farther away from others?

Where is God in all of this? In my bounty? In my rest? In how I go about my day? What would you say to the rich farmer?

If the rich farmer risked exposing his longing and reaching out beyond himself, I hope I would say these words from Julian of Norwich, not to excuse his unjust ways, but because these words guide me to God and give me rest. Because these are the words I hope someone would say to me:

God is nearer to us
Than our own soul,
Because God is the ground
In which our soul stands
And God is the means
Whereby our substance
And our sensuality
Are kept together
So as never to be apart.
Our soul stands in God in its very strength
Our soul sits in God in its very rest
Our soul is rooted in God's endless love
Therefore, if we acknowledge our Soul and the communing therewith,
we will seek God in whom our soul is enclosed.

May it be so. Amen.