

*The Land of Storage Units*

Luke 12:13-34

Around the lakeside community of Charlevoix, Michigan where Donna and I lived there were acres of storage units. (Much like it is here but more so.) Mostly these are storage for boats, but also other things as well, RVs, ATVs, UTVs, antique cars, extra furniture, old stuff from Grandma's you're hoping to make a fortune on by selling on Ebay! Many of them were single buildings privately owned, huge pole barn like structures, in which people keep all their "stuff."

A few are rather extravagant, like the one owned by the founder of a certain well-known boat manufacturing company. His "storage unit" was a boathouse right on the Round Lake Harbor in Charlevoix. But not just your run of the mill one or two slip boathouse! He had this very elaborate edifice built to house his private collection of antique wooden boats, many dating from the 1920 and 30s. It has three 80' long by 24' wide berths. The interior is lined with cypress wood and has 22 hoists some able to handle boats up to 40 feet long. The collection between kayaks, canoes, sail boats, race boats, and his antique wooden boats totals around 30 watercraft. He will admit that his multi-million boathouse tends to overshadow the smaller 5 bedroom 7 full and 4 half bathroom 10,000+ sq. foot home. (If you're interested it's on the market now for a tidy little sum of 6.8 million.)

Before we moved to Laconia, I made several calls attempting to secure a storage unit for our household belongings. And after several calls over a couple of weeks, I was able to find one. (And as those of you who helped unload know it wasn't quite big enough!)

There are your 10 x24 storage units and then there are storage edifices, temples to the god of abundance!

Across our nation storage unit facilities have are spreading like witch grass on the edges of our communities, storage units and the more I travel some variety of a Dollar Store.

Consider this: in the U.S. there is 2.3 billion square feet of personal storage contained in nearly 48,500 facilities. Some companies so large they are publicly traded companies! 15 years ago the revenues from storage units had already exceeded that of Hollywood!

Even as the size of the average American home has grown by 50% and family size shrunk since the 70's, we still fill our storage units! I know of at least one place where they are a bit more honest and call their multi-unit storage facility "Toy Boxes." If you build it, we will fill!

Now, I know there are many of us here who have things tucked away in storage facilities or old barns, in a brother-in-law's garage (Fellas, you know where you keep it!) It would seem to me that to a certain extent our culture has come to measure personal value, our success, even ourselves by all the things we have accumulated. And the more the better.

"I got all this stuff. I know what I'll do! I go over to that old landfill where they've put in that new "U Store More" facility and get me another 12x24 footer! Then I'll be able to enjoy all the good things I have."

As the t-shirts proclaim, 'Life is good!'"

But God said, “Don’t be foolish! By tomorrow a misfortune will strike you and none of these things will be able to sustain you. It will all go to the highest bidder on Storage Wars.”

Now it was one thing in Jesus’ time when storehouses actually held a family’s or community’s food stores. Stuff like grain, dried fruits, olive oil, wine for drinking, things that were necessary to see your family through. But even then, Jesus warned through parable about putting too much faith, too much stock (trust) in the abundance of “stuff.”

Now it would be easy enough for me to stop right here and make this a religious version of the old adage, “You can’t take it with you.” which as we know, is true enough. Then I could put words in Jesus’ mouth like, “So be generous with what you have!” And if I really want to make it religious and be a good pastor, I would add, “So be generous with your assets – especially to the church!” But is this what Jesus means when he says “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not *rich toward God*.”?

Seems to me the case Jesus is making in this parable is not so much about being careful about how much we put away as in dividends and investments (barns, the stuff in our storage units, whatever it may be.) as it is in the distractions these and other things may become. Too much focus on the things we accumulate, and we just might not be able to see around all the stuff to something better.

Being rich toward God has less to do about limiting the size and number of our storage units, our pension plan, I.R.A. 401ks etc. and more about our attitude towards those things and where our ultimate trust lies. Do we trust more in the

padlock on the storage unit door or in God who should have the key to our hearts?

*Our capacity to trust in God can deepen only to the extent other matters lessen their grip in our lives.* (The “Monkey Trap” illustration banana in a box. Until we lessen our grip on some things, we will not be able to grab a hold of the hand of God.)

Still, even as we live in the land of storage units, and our mixed intentions towards the things kept there, I was reminded recently that there are people like Richard and Donna Horne whose home the mission team painted.

Richard had his storage unit. It was under the trees in front of his house, a collection of automobile parts that maybe he or a neighbor might need. It was the condemned house next door from which he scavenged shingles to replace the bad ones on his house. It was the bed of his old pick up where everyone knew what odd job season it was by the tools and such he carried.

The stuff he accumulated was something that he believed he or some neighbor may need someday. In his own way he was being rich, at least toward his neighbors.

Most of us have rich lives, perhaps not in riches, but rich lives. We just have to learn to see where the real value of our lives lay. It is okay to have things. It is okay to store things away. Even a multi-million-dollar boathouse! We just need to watch out that they do not distract us from better things!

In the end each of us has to answer for ourselves what it means to be rich toward God.