

This rich man who God called a fool is the opposite of Jesus, a perfect foil.
The rich man had many possessions; Jesus had nothing.
The rich man loved his stuff; Jesus loved his people.
The rich man talked only to himself in strange soliloquy;
Jesus talked with his many friends in ministry.
When making a great decision, the rich man did not pray; only soliloquy.
When Jesus faced his great crisis, he was constantly and intimately in prayer.
He talked to God, in the garden, along the road, on the Cross.
And so the rich man made a plan to enlarge his barns and hang on to his earnings.
He thought this a balm to his soul, because he consulted neither God nor his neighbor.
It scratched his itch, and we all have them.
Jesus was led in the other direction; he walked the way to the Cross with great intention,
ready to lay down all he had and his very life for the sake of love.
He had talked to God and to others. And what he did was holy.

The man is a creation of Jesus, from his inspired imagination,
He is almost too bad to be true, at least, we might wish.
A character seen only in the one dimension of his relationship to his wealth.
Perhaps Jesus gave him to us as a dramatic example of what we ought not be, if we belong to him.
And we ought not be too quick to dismiss him as not very realistic.
Recent data shows that we give less away, as a percentage of our income, as our income rises.
People making less than \$50,000 per year gave away 4% of their income. (2011 tax returns)
Those making more than \$100,000 drop down to 2.6%.
We hold steady in the 2% range until income rises above \$4 million, then a little more than 3%.
And people in poor states, like South Carolina, give much more as a percentage of their income, than do wealthy states like New York.
To be sure, 2% of a million dollars does a lot of good in the world.
Yet Jesus' story of the widow's penny calls us all to account.
Clearly our comfort with the things of this world and the ways of it increase as our barns fill up.
The great spiritual remedy Jesus has given us for that comfort is giving, this is his counsel to us.

That is what he would have recommended to the man in his parable.
But the rich man seemed to have no use for the advice and conversation of others.
When his crops produced greatly, he asked himself what to do and did it.
Bigger barns, all his profits retained, he readily agreed with himself.

A friend, a rabbi, a neighbor, might have come up with another idea or two.
What about the orphan child the men of the synagogue have been collecting for?
Or the widow whose ends were clearly not going to meet?
You heard how much she gave away when last she went to the Temple!
Or the community gathering for the hungry or to pay for funerals and weddings?
I think of one of you who came to me last December, with a check intended from
someone in the congregation who needed it most, trusting my advice.
Or Warren Buffet, giving away his billions, trusting that Bill Gates and his foundation to
know where the greatest impact can be made.
The extra we have can lead us into a closed loop in which we hear only our own voice.
Or it can lead us beyond ourselves, to hear the Spirit speaking in the voices of others,
Uncovering the deep needs of our world and our capacity to meet them.

Without deep soul friends with whom to share his thoughts and the joy of this
abundance, the man was left seeing his wealth as only for his own good.
And it proved not be for his own good; it was instead soul destroying.
His wealth took him out of deep relationship, rather than into it.
Think of Ebenezer Scrooge or his contemporary equivalent,
the paranoid person who spends her days in the isolation that money can buy.
And it did not have to be that way; the man could have had so much more,
if only he had given.
The joy of seeing others' lives transformed, his village improved,
the needs of God's beloved poor met.
People would have loved him, cared for him, remembered him.

As we do with Jesus.
For it is the perfect generosity of Jesus that revealed him as Savior.
The Scriptures reveal Jesus to us as a person of great power.
He drew men and women to himself;
He calmed storms, winds, and waves;
He had command over illness and even death;
What would we expect such a person to do?
To gather a kingdom to himself, power, rule, and authority.
And instead, Jesus gave all of it away.
He gave his divine love to everyone who would follow him,
the keys to the kingdom and the power to forgive.
He gave his disciples and then us the church, the means of grace, the hope of glory.
He gave his body and life through his death on the cross and to us continually in font
and at the table.
And he gave his resurrection to all as well, a sign of new life promised to all; death
defeated on our behalf.

There were many real-life landowners like the man in Jesus' parable, men who squeezed every drachma, every peasant, under their control. And none of them have been remembered to us; their villas are in ruins, their names forgotten. And then there is Jesus, the giver of every good gift, who gave his life for us and for a pattern for us, That we might be something other than rational economic actors; Indeed agents of the kingdom of God.