

**“All the Pretty Little Horses”  
1 Kings 3:16-28; Luke 12:13-21**

Storing up. When we hear this parable that Jesus tells, perhaps we



think of silos, cornfields, harvest, and grain. And that’s exactly the metaphor Jesus uses to describe “storing up” to the man in the crowd who approaches him for

help to get his deserved portion of an inheritance.

It’s too easy for a preacher to cut to the chase by saying, “So don’t put your security into money but into God” and glibly call it a “stewardship” sermon.

But, alas, Jesus’s warning interrupts any such notion a preacher may have about focusing this parable strictly on the pocketbook. Jesus says, “Watch out, beware of all greed! Your life doesn’t consist of the sum total of your possessions...This very night your soul will be demanded of you! Now who’s going to have the things you’ve got ready?”

As I said: Jesus preempts any sermon that goes immediately to the pocketbook as if Christian stewardship is about money and only money. The “who’s going to have” changes the impact of the parable because “storing up” is much more than about shoring up your life and security with money. I think this “much more” impact is where Jesus wants the conversation to begin. “Storing up” is about the breaking down of relationships. It’s about the harmfulness of hatred and division. “Storing up” is about the perils of going your own way and relying only on your own concerns. It’s the sad result of “me first” in a “me-my-and-mine” culture. It’s all about wanting for ourselves what we perceive as “fair” and “just” — “our rightful share.” This is a very problematic scenario because our sense of justice is usually distorted.

For Jesus, there’s something much more important at stake in this man’s question than money. For Jesus, the much more important thing is the man’s relationship with his brother. “Who’s going to have what you planned for yourself if you have broken-off your relationship with your brother over this issue of inheritance?”

Talk to anyone who has ever served as a chaplain or caregiver in a hospital or hospice. He or she will tell you that those facing imminent death will testify to and be concerned about the same two things. Every person — assuming they aren't psychotic. What are these two things?

- 1) the only important thing in life before death were their relationships.
- 2) they deeply mourned and grieved wanting to mend any relationships that had been broken. I have kept vigil with the dying. Not one of them mourned the loss of a career. Not one of them grieved the loss their home or lack of success — or even their critical health at that point. The only thing they grieved was how some particular moment, some badly-conceived choice, some damaging words affected their relationships.

Each of us may know a few farmers, but most of us are not those farmers storing up grain. And yet in our lives, we store up manure and baptize it sacrosanct by calling it “principled opinion” or some other hogwash. We can store up resentments. We can store up anger. We can store up hatred. We can store up hurts — whether real or imagined. We can store up emotional pain. We can store up monsters from the past. We can store up guilt. We can store up envy. We can store up jealousy.

We can store up shame. Most of us have more than just a pantry-sized space to store that stuff. Some of us hide it better than others, thinking no one's the wiser — not even God. This might be what it means to be the one whom God calls, "Fool!" All of these separate us not only from others, but from our relationship with God. We all build silos of emotional grievances, gripes, and self-righteous sludge that can clog us up emotionally and poison connections between us and others.

The only way to be free from that kind of blockage of the arteries and hardened heart of suspicion is an infusion of love that can purge all our stoppages. The good news is that Jesus is the ultimate heart doctor. He's the one who sets us free. Jesus is the cardiologist of love. And Jesus's justice begins with love.

Not one of us truly wants to receive what they deserve. Is there anyone here or listening from elsewhere who wants to stand before the Almighty and say, "Okay, it's my turn. Give me justice!"? Of course not. We want the Almighty to inflict that kind of "justice" upon others! If the Lord would just pound so-and-so and such-and-such into the ground, the world would be so much better. But when it comes to our

righteous selves — no, let’s not try to worm our way out of this — we don’t want for ourselves what we deserve. We don’t want our “just desserts.” We don’t want even a little piece of humble pie. We want for ourselves more than anything the grace and mercy of our God catered and served to us according to our personal taste. Amen?

“Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy” — because God’s justice is love-soaked and mercy-cloaked.

That’s what King Solomon knew, right? Two women (prostitutes — but we’re not judging them and assuming we’re somehow “better” people, right?) arguing over the “ownership” of a



child. So when the wise king decided to cut the child in two, the one who loved revealed herself as the true mother of the child. She was the one who loved enough to give-up what was due her and to value instead the life of the child over what she wanted and deserved.

The end of division is love. Love isn’t fair. That’s why it’s love. Love isn’t self-gaining or self-serving. Love is self-sacrificial. We need

to spend more quality time with Jesus if we don't get this. Love doesn't keep score. Love isn't audited. Love dreams a dream of unity, a dream of promise. Love dreams a dream of hope which goes above and beyond anything we can store up for ourselves by our own hand. Love is a lullaby that comforts us through times of division and gives us hope for a different, even dream-like, future.

Division, before and during the American Civil War, was all too real. Many people were torn between family and duty. Many between friends and nation. Numerous others torn between living in shame or enlisting to march off to certain death. Some of the most poignant stories of the Civil War, though, come through the songs of Black slaves — “spirituals” we call them. One of the lesser-known spirituals, “All the Pretty Little Horses,” is actually a lullaby. Because of its notation, it's a haunting melody. The lyrics are also haunting. Perhaps you remember it:

Hush-a-bye, don't you cry  
Go to sleep you little baby  
When you wake, you shall have  
All the pretty little horses  
“Rest your head,” mama said  
Go to sleep you little baby

“When you wake, you'll have cake”  
Coach and six little horses  
Blacks and bays  
Dabbles and grays  
All the pretty little horses  
Way down yonder in the meadow  
Lies a poor little lambie  
Bees and butterflies flutter ‘round his eyes  
Poor little thing’s crying “Mammie”  
Blacks and bays  
Dabbles and grays  
All the pretty little horses  
Hush-a-bye, don’t you cry  
Go to sleep you little baby  
When you wake, you shall have  
All the pretty little horses

The song, so it has been said, was sung by black women to comfort white children. During the time of slavery many Black women were forced to leave their own children behind as they tended to those of their masters. Owning a horse was a sign of freedom so when this mother sang about the baby “way down yonder in the meadow,” the “poor little baby crying Mammie” was storing up her pain, sorrow, and loss all the while hoping for a better day. While the song is heart-breaking and you can feel the sorrow of the mother and the loneliness of her abandoned child — the song, like many spirituals do, contains a promise: “When you wake, you will have all the pretty little horses.” This is a mother’s

dream for her little child. She dreams of a better life in a better kind of place, where life is beautiful and she and her child are free from all the hurt.

This Civil War-era lullaby isn't so different from the vision of St. John the Divine which we know today as the book of Revelation. The world of the early church was a war-torn, violent, and exceedingly hard place. But the new heaven and earth would be coming where every person would eat and drink from God for free. What a vision! What a dream! No, that's not "just"! No, that's not "fair" because God's justice is love-soaked and mercy-cloaked! And that's rather good news for undeserving people like him and her, so-and-so and such-and-such — underserving people like you and me. This is a vision where silos and resentments end and love reigns. Where anger and jealousy, evil and envy are defeated. Where God's people will live in beauty and hope in unity with God and feasting at his heavenly table. Where we celebrate true freedom.

We all need a lullaby like that, don't we? What's our dream today, Church?



Our world today feels as if it has splintered into a thousand fragments. Relationships have been broken over politics, religion, or petty disagreements. And, boy, have we stored up the resentments. It feels often that the world has stored up resentments about us, too. We live in a state of perpetual “separation.” And the cracks in our façade are really beginning to crumble.

How do we love a world that has silos on every corner? Christian-built silos? How do we tear down our own silos, and be free to love when we’re trembling in fear about the future? How do we rebuild those relationships that we know God wants us to rebuild?

Often, as the Church, I think we don’t know what to do about it. We feel dissociated sometimes from our culture, don’t we? We feel sometimes, I think, that we’re neglecting people whom God loves, but we don’t know how to love them in a world that rejects us.

But I believe that God has a dream for the Church. God has a continued dream for the Church in this world, and we must be ready to receive it. That dream is a dream of love and reconciliation. And that kind of love always starts with Jesus the Messiah. This is what Jesus

tells us in this parable today. Focus your eyes on Jesus. Restore that relationship, and all the others will follow. Life is all about relationships. It's not about storing up money, or resentments, or fear, or hesitancy. Life is about storing up relationships.

Who are the broken relationships in your life? Where are the broken relationships within our church? Within our community? Within our nation? Within our world?

I invite you now to take a moment to pray. Pray for Jesus to restore your relationship first of all with him. Pray that he guide you in restoring the broken relationships in your life. Pray that Jesus will break down the walls between you and others. Pray that he tear all of our silos down—in our lives—among Christians and non-Christians, allowing love to flow out of us like a fountain of living water. Pray that all walls between Christians and their communities be dissolved in a sea of love. Pray that God's dream of unity for the church be realized through the power and presence of the One and only Living God and his only Son Jesus the Messiah. Pray that love will prevail. Pray that the power of the

Holy Spirit will wear down our resistance and quell our fears. Pray that the love of God which passes all understanding might be realized in you.

The image of a silo is important to ponder. A silo of hurt separates



and hides away. It may protect, but more often sanctions away. It's a symbol of control and ownership. The Church can sometimes become a silo, in which the idea of "ownership" super-cedes the reality that the Church belongs to God and is open and available to all people.

We are called to be God's church based not on the concept of our ownership but on the concept of trusteeship. We're to be the people who "hand-out" the sustenance and food of the Gospel to all people who will hear it and receive it. The "food" of Jesus isn't ours to hoard away, but is a gift we must share.

For God, relationships are paramount — which brings us back in terms of the lullaby, "All the Pretty Horses" — that one day our world can live a dream of unity with "dapples and grays, pintos, and bays" all

living together in the great “field” of the One, True God under the shining light of the Son.

Our world right now needs more dreamers. We need more healers and dreamers. A lot of the prominent Christian voices liken themselves to be prophets — but they’re angry and their anger adds to more anger. What happened to love? Aren’t Christians supposed to be known for love rather than anger? Angry people aren’t really free. It takes creative courage to heal and to dream God’s dream for the world — and to follow that dream to freedom. The kingdom of God is, after all, all about relationships — with God, with yourself, with each other, and with creation. Amen.

