

So if you ask the kids, I don't think any of them are going to say that one of my favorite parts of our trip was one of theirs, because let's face it, at some point throughout the week these kids were going to have to appease their pastor and they did that on Wednesday morning. Call it morbid or weird, but one of the things I wanted to see most when we went to New Orleans was the cemeteries. Just in case you aren't familiar, cemeteries in New Orleans are particularly unique because of the fact that the city is a swamp. You can't bury anyone beneath the ground because the reality is, they will just rise back up to the top, and let's be real, nobody needs that.

So instead, New Orleans cemeteries are filled with massive above ground crypts. Some are very simple and some are exceedingly elaborate. After we had spent some time walking around as a group with Erik serving as impromptu tour guide, we split off to wander a bit. I took the opportunity to FaceTime Jennifer to show her around a little bit, because I get my own fascination with cemeteries from her hauling me around them on vacations when I was younger. There was one in particular I really wanted to show her, and needless to say, she was impressed.

Crypt isn't even remotely close to the right word for this burial spot. It was a legit *castle*, complete with mini ramparts and stained glass windows. There were double doors that opened up onto more stained glass,

and if it had been sunny out, I'm sure those windows would have shown. Jennifer's curiosity was piqued and so while we were on the phone she Googled the family that was laid to rest there. Well...it turned out, it wasn't a family that was there...

The castle was the resting place of "Old Lady Skelly" as she was known. Now, Old Lady Skelly and her daughter had a rather volatile relationship, particularly when it came to money. Given the nature of her castle tomb, you could tell that Old Lady Skelly was loaded with cash, and her daughter felt that it was her right to spend all that money and make crummy decisions with it. Apparently during one of their particularly nasty blow-ups the daughter declared, "When you're dead, I'll have all your cash!" Well, Old Lady Skelly was not one to back down from a challenge and so she used her money and her means to persuade the court system to move around gravestones so she could build the grandest tomb possible with all the money she had left. She then proceeded to build the monstrosity of a castle that we all saw as the final resting place for her *and*, wait for it...her dog. She then made it clear in her will that her daughter wasn't allowed to be buried with her and would have to find her own tomb.

I felt bad, but I absolutely burst out laughing when Jennifer recounted this story to me, because...man, talk about some spite and some ingenious

spite at that. This woman was so bound and determined that her daughter didn't get any of her money that she poured every ounce she had into a tomb she would occupy all by herself except for her dog. I mean you have to give her a smidge of credit for creativity. However, once my laughter subsided, my mind drifted to our gospel lesson for today, and there echoed the words, the desire to build bigger and better barns.

It seems that Lady Skelly's daughter isn't the only one who has inheritance concerns, because it is a very question of what one will receive upon the death of a loved one that leads Jesus to tell this parable this morning. From the crowds which throng Jesus comes a voice, "Teacher! Tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me!" Apparently, Jesus' reputation has proceeded him so much so that people are seeking his wisdom and declarations when it comes to every facet of life. If you can get Jesus on your side, there's little argument to be had. Jesus, however, is entirely unconcerned with this request, basically saying no one made him judge and jury over the squabbles of siblings and families; a lesson Martha learned the other week as well.

Jesus then issues a warning not just to the one asking him the question, but to the entire crowd, "Guard your hearts against all kinds of greed! Life is not defined by the abundance of possessions, the seeking of

an abundance of possessions is not the meaning of life. Jesus has read between the lines of the request made to him about this inheritance squabble. It isn't an issue of fairness or family dynamics. It's an issue of greed. The more money you have, the more things you can buy, the more things you can buy, the more you have for people to see and admire, the more people admire you, maybe the more they fear you or the more they're willing to extend you power. Jesus knows what's going on here. This is all about money and the desire to hoard stuff. Thus, we have this parable...

A man has grown sooooo successful that his barns are fit to bursting. Now, as the granddaughter of a farmer, my first question is, dude why aren't you doing something with all the food you're storing because ya know, food spoils. But that doesn't seem to bother this man at all. What bothers him is that he has run out of room, and so he sits down to ponder a solution. The only solution he can think of? MORE BARNNS!!! And not just any barns, but bigger and better barns where he can store up all the goods he can possibly grab. So he sets off to build his barns and once he does, he sits back, relaxes, and says now my soul can rest. He can eat, drink, and be merry because he is set for life. What more does he need to worry about? He has food, he has money, he has more land that he can fathom. Life is good and so he's content to chill. Unfortunately for our guy here is that he

failed to account for one thing...the possibility that he may be around long enough to enjoy the lap of luxury that he has built up for himself. That very night, God calls him the worst thing that a person could be called during Jesus' time, a fool, and tells him that all his decisions have not been those of a wise man, but one who couldn't see what was truly important. His life is being demanded of him, and all those fit to bursting barns? What good are they going to be now? Whose will they be? Who will care about his bigger and better barns now that he is gone?

It's a parable I think most of us would prefer to ignore. Let's be honest, it doesn't fit in with our 21<sup>st</sup> century America mentality. So much of what we are ingrained with from the moment we can start processing information is that we need more. More money, more stuff, more things to show up, more investments, more stacked up in the bank for a rainy day. We heavily critique those who don't have as much as we do, or we judge those who make different life decisions than we do, because isn't the name of the game getting the most you can with what you've got?

And I know, we want to say, no no no, this isn't me. But how many of us have more than one car? A bigger house that we even remotely need? A membership to Costco or Sam's where we have the luxury to buy peanut butter by the gallon and bags of popcorn as big as our heads? A vacation

home? The ability to go on multiple vacations a year? Enough money to put gas in your car even when it edged towards five dollars a gallon?

Subscriptions to multiple streaming services? We don't have to look much beyond our own front doors to find the answer to the question just what exactly are we storing up?

And it goes well beyond our own personal lives. This parable also demands of us as churches to ask ourselves what are we storing up? What are we hoarding for a rainy day? One of our kids said something this week that has not stopped ringing in my ears. They said, "They are doing so much more with so much less." They were talking about the church where we worshipped and did our community service. This church that was in a rough neighborhood, whose building had windows still bearing the scars of stray bullets and vines coming through small cracks in the room, this church that maybe had thirty people in worship including us. This church that has built up a community feeding program, with a chef who doles out homemade tamales and three cheese sliders with tomato jam, twice a week to at least 500 people. This church that says all you need to be is present and hungry to find a meal here. This church who probably doesn't have many pennies to rub together, who are putting more love and more joy and more gospel into their community than many churches I've ever seen.

They are doing so much more with so much less. What is the legacy that we want to leave behind? Both in our own lives and as a church? Do we want to leave behind a two car garage and a three story house, with a legacy that said yeah I'm taking the dog with me to eternity but not my daughter? Do we want to leave behind a massive building that glimmers and shines, but doesn't let anyone else around it know that they are loved? It's a question we all have to answer for ourselves and it is a question we have to answer as a community. What do we want to store up? What do we want to give away? What do we want to give up so we can give out more?

Who do we want to be? The people with the huge barns fit to bursting where we lounge inside with our feet up going ah look at how far we have come? Or the people that tear down the barns because we don't need them anymore because we've given everything inside of them away? Do we want to hoard our love, our means, our ability to help our community our neighbors? Do we want to say we may need this in fifty years so you can't have it now when you're in need? I hope for all of us, deep down, we share the same answer, but that same answer is going to require bold and faithful action in a world that is aching with need. I don't know about you, but I desperately do not want to be the person that God calls a fool because I missed the opportunity to help my neighbor live. **AMEN!!!**