

Every July first, I know my phone is going to pop with more than one text message wishing me a happy very specific day, a day that has nothing to do with me, and is kind of weird to acknowledge, but like I said, it happens every year. Every year, as much as I wish it to others, they also wish me, a very happy Bobby Bonilla Day. Unless you are a Mets fan, or a bit of a baseball fanatic, you probably have no idea who or what I am talking about.

Bobby Bonilla was a pretty decent baseball player in the early nineties, spending time with the Pirates and the Mets mostly. By the late nineties, his career was waning and the Mets had to decide what to do with his contract. Cue an immensely savvy sports agent. In 2000, the Mets owed Bonilla \$5.9 million but they didn't want to pay that out to a player whose career was nearing an end, so they decided that it was better for their bottom line to agree to pay him a million dollars every July first until...wait for it...2035. Yup, \$35 million as opposed to \$5.9 million. Now...the complicating factor here is that this is New York in the year 2000 and the Mets ownership thought that they had a much better plan in mind for that \$5.9 million and so this once a year payment wouldn't mean anything once they had invested what they were keeping with Bernie Madoff...that didn't exactly work out the way that they had planned, but for Bobby Bonilla, well...it came out looking pretty good. He retired in 2001 after another season and a half of lackluster

baseball, and has not touched a baseball diamond since, and yet...he still gets that check in the mail every single July first. A cool million just for chilling there and doing nothing, not a bad deal when planning for your retirement when you think about it and so you have to imagine that part of that million *has* to go to his agent, right? Because that is one heck of a deal. And as we turn to our gospel this morning, it would seem that someone in Jesus' audience would like him to be their own sports agent, or at the very least their own investment banker. They are desperate for some savvy financial intervention and in their mind, who better to ask than Jesus?

Someone in the crowds listening to Jesus seems to have run into a problem with his brother in regards to their inheritance from their parents. Now, we have to remember that in Jesus' time, matters of inheritance weren't dealt with in the same way that they are today. Today, typically, barring some interesting family dynamics, each child is left with something, maybe not much, but most likely some form of even distribution. That is not the case in ancient Israel. For men in Jesus' time, and yes, we are only dealing with men when it comes to this stuff, the full family inheritance went to the oldest son. Typically there is nothing left for the younger sons and it is up to the eldest to figure out how the family money is going to be distributed from that point on. Well, this doesn't seem to sit well with the

man in Jesus' crowd. He tells Jesus to tell his brother to divide the inheritance with him. No reason given as to why, no explanation for what's going on between these two brothers, no indication that the eldest brother shouldn't have a right to the inheritance, just, "Jesus, arbitrate this for me." Imagine thinking that *Jesus* was your best bet when dealing with matters of money. Imagine thinking that asking Jesus such a question is going to end up going your way. It goes about as well as one could imagine.

Jesus tells him right off of the bat that this isn't his job, he is neither judge nor arbitrator over his family's financials, but of course this is Jesus so we can't just leave it there, he goes on to warn him where such a path is going to lead, a path fixated and focused on matters of wealth, prosperity, and money. Jesus addresses the crowd as a whole and tells them that they have to be on guard against all kinds of greed, and if you're the guy that asked the question, you have to be trying to shrink as much as possible, right? Like imagine being the guy that leads Jesus to teach about greed? Not a great position to be in.

As if the warning wasn't enough, Jesus turns to a parable. We have a rich man who has land which has been abundantly prosperous, so prosperous in fact that he has run out of room to store all of his crops and so he looks around at his lands and ponders what to do. The answer comes to him

immediately. Obviously, the most productive and logical answer is to tear down his current barns and build bigger ones in which to store his excess produce. Now, we don't know what kind of produce that we're dealing with here, but there are few crops that are going to last, outside of proper storage, long enough to survive the removal of the original stored crops, the tearing down of the original barns, and then the rebuilding of the bigger barns. This isn't some weekend project, this is a weeks long task, and yet, it is the task the rich man sets for himself because in his mind this is his one way path to prosperity. Once he does this, he will have enough goods laid up for a rainy day, he can retire, he can relax, eat, drink, and be merry. He has come up with the Bobby Bonilla of barns. Bigger barns equals retirement time. But there's always a twist right?

Just as he has come up with this game changer of a plan, God shows up on the scene with one of the deepest insults you can say to a person in Jesus' time. God calls the man a fool...something you never wanted to be called at this time when wisdom was seen as one of the greatest gifts a person could possess. All that planning, all that self-aggrandizing, all those hopes for eating, drinking, and making merry? It was for naught because tonight his life is being demanded of him and where will all these goods of his go now? What will be done with all of these goods, all of these plans for

bigger barns now that he knows his life is coming to a close? He can't take the goods with him, he can't build the barns in eternity? In the midst of all of his planning, he failed to plan for God, for a relationship with God, for a relationship with his neighbor that came even remotely close to his relationship with his wealth.

So let's just get it out there, right? State the obvious. There's no way to be comfortable with this text. There's no way to spin this and make it so that we aren't held accountable to what the gospel has to say. We want to. We want to say, but we aren't *that* wealthy. We certainly aren't rich. We don't hoard things. We would never ask Jesus to arbitrate an inheritance for us. We are perfectly comfortable with how rich we are towards God, so we don't really need to talk about this. Trust me...I don't want to either.

Jennifer and I both lamented all week, while sitting on vacation, that this was the last text we wanted to talk about. And yet...here we are.

And the problem here isn't wealth. It isn't being well off. It isn't being comfortable. Jesus never says, you shouldn't be talking about inheritance at all! Jesus says the problem is greed, the problem is storing things up for ourselves and focusing all of our life's attention on that and ignoring our relationship with God, usually because we're ignoring our relationship with our neighbor for the sake of keeping our wealth to

ourselves. And it is extremely hard to argue that this isn't a problem, an infinitely bigger problem now in 21st century America than it was in ancient Israel. And I fear what kind of parable Jesus would have for us if he showed up today and observed the world we have constructed for ourselves.

In this country alone, 1% of the population controls 30% of our wealth, and that probably makes most of us shudder, but it's a system we have willingly bought into. Our desire for convenience, for overnight shipping, for the latest and greatest new thing have brought us to a point where we have built an economic model that thrives off of the wealthy getting wealthier, and we complain about it, and yet...the number of apps on our phone that allow us to spend money at literally a click of a button is astounding. And sure, some of us have been able to cut the cord with Amazon or Target or a smart phone, but y'all, we all got something, something that we are like yes, please, take my money. I own more books than I could ever possibly need to have. How many of us have more than two streaming services on our tv? How many of us can throw in the packet of Oreos at the store because we feel like it? And at the same time how many of us look at the people with signs on the corners or pushing their belongings in a shopping cart and rather than view them with empathy look

with judgment? How many of us see a poor person with a smart phone and scoff and say well then they shouldn't need help?

And even if we set that aspect of it aside, how many of us spend anywhere close to the amount of time that we use thinking about money, possessions, plans for the future as we do thinking about our relationship with God? How many of us have as close of a relationship with God as we do with our phone? We have made it abundantly clear where our loyalties lie and it is not with God, it is with the world and all the prosperity, comfort, and satisfaction we can squeeze out of it. And I say all of that knowing full well that I've got the same problem. It's extremely difficult to not live fully into the world we have cultivated and created. If we don't, we feel like a fool, and to this day no one wants to feel like that.

I want to say I don't know what the answer is, because that's easier, but we all know what it is—letting go of our fixation on the bigger barns, the bigger house, the bigger car, the bigger bookshelf—and asking ourselves how can I deepen my life with my creator, how can I give more of my heart over to God who loves me so much to have sent Jesus to teach us the hard stuff, how can I let go of my inclination for more and decide that there is such a thing as enough, except when it comes to faith, when it comes to God. The barns are full enough, we don't need an agent, just Jesus. **AMEN!**