

An older woman, over the course of her life, accumulated a large number of quilts. She had about 25 in all, most of which had been handed down to her through her husband's family and her's. A few of the quilts she had made herself.

She was a widow who had never had much money and had always lived her life simply. Some of the quilts were tattered and torn, and, although she had mended them several times, she took care not to add any new fabric. Several of the quilts were very old, dating back as far as 1800.

To this woman each quilt told a story. They were treasures, not because of their monetary value, but because each reminded her of someone she loved. She was a faithful Christian and the church had been the center of her life, as it had been at the center of the lives of preceding generations in her and her husband's families.

Each quilt echoed the stories of her childhood, of the long generations of faithful people, who sewed and prayed and lived together as a family. Although these people are now gone from her sight, they are, to her, still visible in what she calls, "God sight."

They live with God but are also living and present in the old fabrics, in the care, in the patience, in the tenderness, in the love they passed along. She could see them, as God sees them, in that love.

As part of her town's historical celebration, the woman was asked to display her quilts and other family heirlooms. She was very honored to have been asked and she chose the neighborhood chapel, where she had served faithfully over the years, for the display area.

She worked a whole week in preparation, getting the quilts and heirlooms out of storage, cleaning them as best she could, displaying them and marking carefully their origin and pattern type. On the day of the celebration, people came from all over to see these treasured quilts.

The woman enjoyed telling stories of the quilts creators and helping people see, with "God sight," the different people who so lovingly made them. At the end of the day, one of her last visitors took her by surprise. The visitor offered the woman a great sum of money for all her quilts. The visitor was an antiques dealer, and very well-meaning.

The woman was shocked and hurt. She said, "How can I sell these quilts, which are as much my story as the story of the people who made them? You missed the whole point of the display!" Afterwards, to a friend, she remarked that she found it peculiar that anyone would think of buying the quilts when they were intentionally displayed in a church.

Unlike this woman who sees herself in relation to generations of loved and loving ancestors as well as in loving relations with her community, the man in the parable Jesus tells (Luke 12:16-21) sees only himself. In the farmer's soliloquy of approximately sixty words, the personal pronouns "I" and "my" occur eleven times.

If we add the references to "soul" and "you," we have 22 percent of the 60 words talking about, well "me, myself, and I." There are no references at all to others—not to family or friends, not to neighbors, not to God.

He sees all he has and all he is as his and his alone. It was his life and he would do with it as he pleased. It was his wealth and he would spend as he pleased.

Jesus thought differently. The NRSV translation of verse 20 has God say: *You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. Demanded by . . .?* It is easy to interpret this to mean the man's life is being demanded by God, but that is not the point.

A more accurate translation clarifies who or what is making the demand: *But God said to him, 'Fool, this night they demand your soul from you.'* "They" are the man's possessions. Somewhere deep inside, we all know that Jesus was stating a powerful and uncomfortable truth: everything we own owns a little bit of us.

Movie magnate Sam Goldwyn, on being told he couldn't take it with him replied, "Well then, I just won't go." Death is the final reminder that life is a gift. We are stewards of this gift. Everything we are and whatever we have, we hold in trust.

When the widow displayed her quilts, it was a reminder to herself and others, that she had been loved, taught and nurtured by so many people in her family and her larger church family. Her display was a witness to the faithfulness of the many generations that came before, and a sign of God's nearness and blessing in her life. Her quilts were a parable of what it means to be rich toward God.