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Fools

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Text: Luke 12:13-31

There was a farmer who loved his land. He knew it as a child knows its mother. He would go down on his hands and knees in still mid-morning and smell the fragrances of it like a connoisseur sniffing a rare wine: "Ah! Needs a rotation of clover!" He would crumble it between his fingers, delicately, like a blind person exploring a rose petal: "Ah! It is tired. It needs rest."

And he was content.

Sometimes, in spring, he went to a secluded spot where the cultivated land gave way to the green tangle of the brook. With boyish relish he took off his boots and heavy socks and walked barefoot in the earth. He was a tree sending roots down, down. He was a lover sinking in warm, earthy embrace to moist richness. He puddled in the brook, and reluctantly put on socks and boots again.

On a day of dust came roaring scrapers and tractors. They ripped and tore the earth, gouged it here and heaped it there, packed and stomped it down with awesome brutality, and left a superhighway down the length of his land.

For a time he was dismayed and angry and heartsick.

When his ears hardened to the rush of traffic he asked, "What does this mean for me?" And he replied to himself, "Ah! Access to markets! I will find out what they need in the city and grow that. For now I have direct access to the market!"

He did so, and prospered. He rubbed his hands in satisfaction.

He stopped at the implement dealer's place and was astonished at the shiny new building. "I had to tear down the old and build new and bigger," the dealer said, rubbing his hands. "Business is good."

The farmer went to the bank. It had been renovated. Gone were the old teller cages, the somber brown tones of old varnish and time-stained plaster. New faces bobbed behind a coral and grey counter.

But the banker was still the banker. "We had to modernize," he said, rubbing his hands. "To be ready for the expected developments."

A voice whispered in the farmer's memory. "Seek first...." What was it? "The Kingdom." But the voice fled.

He pondered. "What does this mean for me? This development?" The banker rubbed his hands and gave him a loan for new machinery and, yes, fertilizer.

And he prospered.

The wind brought the stench of exhaust fumes from the superhighway. It occurred to him that he could no longer smell the earth; baffled for a moment, he mumbled something about the smell of progress. He had no time for his springtime barefoot walk. Anyway, the brook was running dark with erosion and effluent.

Nevertheless he prospered, for he studied the market.

There came a day when a developer drove in his farm lane and made an offer to buy. "Sell your land," he said, rubbing his hands. "The time is right."

On the hood of his car he spread out a huge blueprint showing streets and shopping malls and housing tracts and industrial areas. Sizing up his customer he observed with studied casualness, "Notice how nicely we have incorporated that white country church into our plans. Beautiful steeple, isn't it?"

The farmer noticed that his brook was routed through a culvert under a parking lot to join a sewer.

The developer gave him a price. The farmer's head swam. That much? For his farm?

He scraped a toe in the earth, and absently noted that the land needed a rest. He looked across his acres (hectares, now!) and saw high rises advancing like columns of giant soldiers.

"You can buy yourself a little place in the country," the developer suggested. "With a brook and some woods. And

still have lots of money left over. Take your wife to Hawaii, England, Europe. Relax." He rubbed his hands. "You deserve it."

The Lord God said, "Fools. You lay up treasures for yourselves and yet are not rich. Of what does a person's life consist? Tell me. Fools."

Some say God said it in anger. Some say God wept.