

What If?

When I was in high school, I had two best friends, Robin and Kathy. Kathy was a year ahead of Robin and I but we were in the same youth group at Berkley First United Methodist Church. We were not the cool kids by a long shot. We were in the flag corp of the marching band. That was our claim to fame. The flag corp where we had these flags on poles and we would have to twist them around in parades and on the football field. On the football field, it was a little more difficult because I believe the pole was 4 feet and I was 5'2". That usually meant that from time to time when I was twirling my flag it would get stuck in the dirt and I would mess up the formation of whatever we were making because I had to pull the flag pole out of the dirt.

So needless to say, we were the way uncool girls at Berkley High School. We loved Barry Manilow, we loved to go to square dances at the church and keep Jack in the Box tacos in Robin's car.

Here's one weird thing we did. It was an exercise called "What if?" We would go out in either Robin or Kathy's car, I didn't have a car, and get some fast food, usually Jack in the Box and find a place to park and we would play "What if." The way you play "what if" is that one person is chosen to be a narrator of the story and the other person chooses who they want their what if story to be about, usually who we had a crush on at the time.

The what if story would be about "what if" they asked us out, and how the date would go and what he would say to us and what we would say to them. These what if stories were usually limited to 30 minutes and the next person would get a turn. I know, this sounds so weird.

When we had crushes on people who didn't know us, we would find out their addresses and park across the street from their house and do the what if stories and watch for activity in the home or by the windows, stuff you would be arrested for now!

But the point of the what if stories was to imagine the possibility of being with your crush and imagining the future with your crush. It was the seventies and we didn't have cell phones or cable yet.

Sometimes we like to imagine the future and what it holds right? And sometimes we try to control the present through our stuff because we need those things to move into the future. If I can have the present circumstances, relationships, vocational opportunities, healing, or insert any other lived experience, then I can have the future I believe I should have. If I can control the perceived scarcity of my life, then maybe I can manifest the abundance that my heart desires. Isn't that what the rich man is doing in our scripture this morning. What if? What if I build bigger barns?

If I can build my barns just right, then maybe I can finally rest and have the life I deserve. And yet, God operates outside of our conceptions of time and space, beyond our understandings of material and spiritual realms.

I'm not sure I recognize the God that Jesus describes in the parable of the rich fool. The God I relate to a God that revels in abundance and pleasure. The God I commune with celebrates rest and ease, delights in the gathering around meals and orients toward joy.

But we do see the rich man's individualism and greed on display in the parable. You see that the "I" and "my" statements are all there and we can see his concern with capturing and holding onto his wealth.

A lot of commentaries on this scripture focus on the rich man's lack of communication with God as he decides what to do with the abundance that the land produces. In this text we look at questions of abundance that helps lead to pleasure and contrast that with the capitalistic system that we find ourselves living in and amongst.

Adrienne Marie Brown writes: "We live in a world which others imagined...someone imagined a racialized economic system built on a foundation of indentured labor and slavery – exploitative production of dehumanized people to benefit those who labor less or not at all. In capitalism the norm and the assumption is that we must always be producing and growing in scale, so we either work ourselves to death, or if we are privileged we work others to death, or under risk of death, those these days we prefer that the exploitation stay out of sight, behind bars or across borders."

Yes, this parable of the rich man is certainly about greed but it's also inviting us to reframe our relationship with materiality that stands apart from what we might call the materialism of the rich man. It's ok to celebrate and revel in the material world. Materiality – body, land, creation – is worthy of lavish recognition. When

we look at the stuff we have and we move towards a more generous giving, we come to know our interconnectedness. By relating, by asking “what if?” about the expansive materials that we do have, we can co-create new practices of joy and pleasure.

My youngest daughter, Hannah is not a church person. As she likes to say, she is spiritual and not religious. So she looks at horoscopes and tarot cards. How many of you know about tarot cards?

Tarot cards are small, paper cards that come in a deck, similar to playing cards and are used for forecasting the future. Each card represents a different archetypal being or lesson. A person shuffles the cards, then lays them out in a Tarot Card spread. There are 78 tarot cards in a complete deck. The first 22 are called the Major Arcana tarot cards. The remaining 56 minor arcana cards are divided into four suits: Wands, cups, swords and pentacles. Each suit contains 14 cards, including 10 numbered cards plus a page, knight, queen and king.

Now, my old Conservative Asbury soul could never have imagined that I would be talking about tarot cards as a sermon illustration. Because I was taught that they are evil, but they aren't. They just rely on your intuition to shuffle and pick the cards and to understand how they apply to you – there is no evil force guiding them. They aren't meant to bring forth spirits or bad luck. They are intended to inspire awareness and help you discover successful ways to approach any part of your life.

In light of today's scripture I thought it might be cool to talk about the card called the Fool Card. Because isn't that what God calls the rich man, a fool?

So the Little Red Tarot website describes the fool saying “The fool asks us to enter into an exchange of trust with the Universe. It asks you to place your trust in the unseen, allow yourself to be guided by curiosity, move beyond self-doubt and fear of failure...and in return you will find yourself on a journey that is richer, more challenging, more rewarding, wilder, freer, less predictable and more fun. You place your faith in the Universe and in your own self – together. You plus the mystery of life is a magical combination.

In tarot, the “foolishness” of The Fool is not seen as a negative attribute. Certainly there is some naivete, but there is an innocence and optimism to the Fool as well. The Fool is embarking on the life journey, not knowing where the path will take them with all the openness and possibility of a full and rich life lying ahead.

The fool in today's gospel parable has completed his worldly life and at the end of his life's journey is met by God who says that he has been found wanting. In the Tarot card's the Fool's journey always ends with the World, a card that represents completion and fullness of the experiences gathered while here on earth, but did the rich fool's journey help create a more mutual and generous world?

The journey of the tarot invites us to consider the inner journey and soul work of any archetype. What if the rich man had opted to reframe the journey that he was on. What if given the opportunity to start a new journey back on the material plane, what lessons would the rich man take? What inner work does the rich fool require to transform into the Fool who curiously jumps into partnership and solidarity with the Divine?

When we meditate on the rich "fool's journey toward the healthy fool's journey, it gives us an opportunity to contemplate how we are called to be engaged in the world around us. The World reveals that, "It is radical self love. It is owning your whole beautiful life. It is knowing, on a cellular level, on a spiritual level, on every level, that you belong, that you are enough. That I belong. That I am enough. How beautiful it would be to be there. Able to love generously, abundantly, unconditionally, takes to that deep embodied sense of our own enoughness. The world shows us how it feels, how it looks hot is is to walk through the world with that understanding.

Grace Lee Boggs used to always ask "What time is it on the clock of the world?" And right now my answer would be, we are in a phase of imagination, co-dreaming a world where our "what if's and "if only's get realized and the patterns of harm cannot go on.

The rich man's journey asks us to consider what kind of "foolish" action would be beneficial to the liberation of the world? How are we using our time and space to build a new world that reflects the abundance of the spiritual and material world! What parts of ourselves are bound to patterns of actions that uphold oppression and what parts of ourselves are being cultivated towards curiosity and generating abundance in and for our relationships. And finally, what new worlds are we willing to imagine and help birth? What are your what ifs? Amen.