

## **Sermon for Eighth Sunday after Pentecost August 4 2019**

### **Luke 12:13-21**

Let's remind ourselves where we are in the Gospel of Luke.

Several weeks back Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem and is traveling from Galilee south to Judea and the Holy City. He has been rejected by a Samaritan village. He has been questioned about how to inherit eternal life and says you inherit by; Loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving your neighbor as yourself. He answered the question, "Who is my neighbor?" by telling the story of the Good Samaritan- neighbor is the one in need and the one who helps me when I am in need. Then we had the story of Mary and Martha, which shows the need to sit at the feet of Jesus and constantly check that our beliefs correspond to Jesus' teachings.

Last week, Jesus showed us in the Lord's Prayer who God is. God is the one who is Holy, who provides enough resources for tomorrow, who protects, who forgives, and who gives us only good gifts. Especially the Holy Spirit.

Now, in the midst exhorting his followers to be fearless in their confession of faith, he is interrupted by this young man asking him to settle an inheritance fight with his older brother. Jesus is smart enough not to get triangulated into that. Instead, he identifies what is really going on in that dispute.

Greed. The desire for more things. The same word is used in our reading from Colossians where the Apostle Paul states that greed is idolatry- trusting something or someone other than God to save.

Beware! Pay Attention! Be on your guard against all kinds of desire for more Jesus says. Because, life is not in an abundance of possessions. The word abundance is the same one used to describe the leftovers collected when Jesus feeds the 5,000 - after all were filled. Life is not found in the surplus left over when you have been filled.

Then Jesus, being Jesus, tells a story. Of a man already fully resourced (that's what rich means) who has a bumper crop. Who pulls down his old barns to build new ones to hold the harvest and tells himself to sit back and relax, he's got years of safety under his belt. He's set!

Jesus calls him a Fool! Someone lacking perspective. Because that very night his life is done. He's dead...and who will benefit from all that stored abundance. So it is with all who store up for themselves but are not rich, fully resourced, toward God.

I think it is worth noting, the man is not described as being corrupt, a bad boss, abusive to his workers. He isn't chided for the fact that he is already rich, or even directly for the fact that he was storing grain away. He is not a fool for making provision for the future. He is a fool because he believes this stuff will secure his future. Even as he is building storehouses for things that will perish...he himself is perishing.

Jesus has a lot to say about those who are "rich" - fully resourced, especially in this Gospel of Luke. Remember, the Gospel begins with Mary in the Magnificat saying the rich will be sent away empty, even as the poor are given good things. Jesus tells us, the rich are to be mourned because they have received their reward. Riches cause our faith to be immature.

Jesus will say it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus, in this and other gospels, has a great skepticism towards riches and wealth. Not because the things themselves are bad, but for the reason described here... they so often take a place in our lives that is reserved for God. Ultimately, all our stuff cannot buy us eternal life. We will all die. Perhaps tomorrow. Perhaps this very minute. And then what will all your stuff be worth to you, whether that is money, or possessions, or experiences you have “collected”. The surplus of resources beyond what fills, what satisfies, what is enough for tomorrow, does not hold life for us.

In this parable, Jesus doesn't condemn those who are rich, but their relationship with their riches. This landowner holds his riches tight- believing that in this abundance of possessions lies- safety, protection, salvation from all those things that threaten us.

But these things cannot save us from the inevitable- death. And they often stand in the way of what we should be fully resourced in... our relationship with God.

As we have this conversation about the surplus in life- there are a number of uncomfortable things that ought to be acknowledged.

I recognize that not everyone among us in this assembly and in our community, is fully resourced. While they may have enough for the next day...they may not be too sure about the day after that.

I recognize that I am preaching to myself. The reality is that between Karen's job and mine we are more fully resourced than many in this

community and need to sit at the feet of Jesus ourselves to hear these words and struggle with our own relationship with our abundance.

Stuff, things, experiences are not bad. Even accumulating them is not bad. But if they become the center of our lives... of what we live for, then God is dethroned. And that's bad.

Do we hold our surplus once we have been filled with open hands or with a closed fist?

Who is the ultimate cause of the rich man's abundance? God... the one who created seed, earth, sun, and rain. Does the rich man at any time give thanks to God? Acknowledge that God, as we pray, is the ultimate supplier of daily bread? No, he does not.

Does the rich man consider having his workers or his community benefit from this surplus? Remembering that he may be the means for God to provide daily bread to someone? No, he does not.

The rich man speaks to his soul (psuche) the vital breath of a person. This is connected with the breath God first breathed into Adam. The soul, Jesus reminds us, should be fully committed to loving God and loving neighbor. Instead, his soul is turned in on itself- considering neither God nor neighbor. The two things that are what true life consists of.

God's love for us is not about whether we are rich or poor. But our God is a jealous God, desiring that we worship God alone. You shall have no other gods before me! We are to trust God alone to save us. When we turn to something else, it hurts God, it hurts our soul, and it hurts our neighbor.

I have never heard anyone on their death bed wish they had more stuff. I have, however, often seen the comfort that comes from the presence of family and friends ( I saw that with Billy Novak and Gloria Malatek), of being rich in a relationship with God and God's church (I saw that most recently in Sue Paige), of having lived a life holding one's wealth in an open hand, knowing that you can't take it with you.

My colleagues and I had a long conversation around this text on Tuesday. Asked a lot of questions and didn't get to many answers.

How do we know what is enough? What are basic needs? Is it just food, water, shelter, clothing? Is it transportation? Health Care? \$1,000 emergency fund? Three months salary saved away (a la Dave Ramsey)?

What about my 401-K? Is it okay to "store up riches for tomorrow" out of my abundance now? If not, what about folks who, because they don't have a savings of even \$500, keep getting smacked down economically when bad things happen?

We realized that talking about money in church, especially as the pastor, is uncomfortable. Your contributions pay my salary and, apart from the mortgage, I'm the biggest expense here.

Even as I say what Jesus is concerned about is our relationship with money not whether we accumulate it, I also hold that in tension with the fact that Jesus might have meant it when he tells the rich young man to sell all that he owns, give the money to the poor, then come follow him.

Even as I know that sometimes giving someone money is not the best thing for them, I hold that in tension with the fact that Jesus might have meant it when he tells us to give to everyone who begs of us.

We don't know, I don't know exactly how we navigate this. I would love to give you four principles, ten steps or three guidelines as all the self-help gurus do. But the fact is that all of us are struggling with this.

What I do know is what Jesus has told us. That God is the source of all that is. God created all that we have enjoyed this last week, sun and breeze, sweet corn and butterflies. And God provides us- one way or another- with what is necessary for the next day. If that does not come, St. Gregory the Great reminds us that is on us for, "If everyone receiving what is sufficient for his own necessity would leave what remains to the needy, there would be no rich or poor."

I know that life is in loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Life is in the relationship with the God who breathed the divine breath into our lungs and who has claimed us in the waters of Baptism as God's children not for what we have done or will do but because God loves us! Life is in the relationships we have with our fellow human beings.

I know that the gift of being fully resourced in our relationship with God. Of knowing the story of God and God's people intimately in our hearts, of assembling to be reminded of that story and to wrestle together with what that means in this community of faith, that this is life.

I know that some of us have gotten a handle on this way of relating to wealth. Who hold it with open hand, ready to share of their abundance with neighbors, those in need. Who understand that what we have now we only steward for a time. I know that many of us still struggle with this. Fighting against what our society values- holding tightly to what we have.

Ultimately, I know that God's love does not depend on our perfect response, on how much we give, on how little we have, on anything other than God's love for us.

So maybe today is just a good checkup for us. A reminder to hold our abundance with an open hand. To love God and our neighbor (those in need) with all that we are. To come to this table and be reminded that God will provide enough for tomorrow. And that I may be the means by which someone receives that. And maybe that is enough for today.