

"All Kinds of Greed"

Sunday, August 1, 2010

Luke 12:13-21

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Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Prayer.

Our Gospel lesson for this morning makes us nervous.

It's like the 800-lbs gorilla in the room that no one wants to talk about.

It's about wealth – the accumulation of money and things.

"Reverend, you're just not supposed to talk about money in church.

It makes the visitors nervous!"

Visitors?

Yea, right.

Jesus has collected a large number of proverbs and parables about wealth –

"The Eye of the Needle"

"The Rich Young Ruler"

"The Rich Man and Lazarus"

"The Widow's Mite"

– and many, many more.

Today's story is labeled by tradition as "The Rich Fool."

If I'm going to preach about the Gospel this morning,

then I'm going to have to preach about money.

Our Gospel lesson for this morning makes us nervous.
The issue of wealth is one of the most frequent subjects Jesus talked about.

If you want to draw closer to Jesus ...

If you want to know more about Jesus ...

If you want to dive deeper into a life of faith in Jesus Christ,
Then you have to know where Jesus stands on the issue of wealth and possessions.

Wealth is a trending topic for Jesus.

He tends to be critical of our behavior with possessions.

He has good reason for this.

Jesus knows that faith and belief are intimately related to riches.

Where your heart is, your riches are soon to follow.

If your heart is with God, then your riches will naturally follow.

If your heart is obsessed with accumulating wealth or possessions,
then your money will naturally follow.

If you want to know what a person believes in,

- I've said time and time again -

Take a look at the registry in their checkbook.

Our Gospel lesson for this morning makes us nervous.

God or mammon?

Who will YOU follow?

They aren't entirely exclusive, of course

- you probably could get a camel through the eye of a needle if you
have first rate engineering skills!

God or mammon?

Who will YOU follow?

Our Gospel lesson for this morning makes us nervous because ...

We tend to place our trust in things we buy,
accounts we open,
and estates we accumulate.

We tend to place our trust in the free market,
in business,
and in industry.

We tend to place our trust in the next trend,
the next diet,
the next rise in the bull market.

We tend to place our trust in the next roll of the dice,
the next pull of the one-armed-bandit,
the next scratch off ticket.
We tend to place our trust in the next drink,
the next smoke,
the next medical miracle that is just bound to come along.
We tend to place our trust in our credit cards,
second homes,
and second mortgages.
We tend to place our trust in our intelligence,
the next call from our financial planner,
the next politician who is willing to promise us the world in exchange
for our vote.

Yet, Jesus calls.
Jesus calls us to a different place.
Jesus calls us to place our trust, our belief, our faith in God,
and in God alone
– not in the wealth or possessions we accumulate.
After all, who is it that provides the mammon in the first place?

Today, Jesus is asked for advice in estate planning.
"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."
Who should get the car, the jewelry, and the land?
Jesus could care less.
Go talk to a lawyer, he is probably thinking to himself.
"Teacher, tell my brother ..."
Jesus said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over
you?"
Oh, yes, Jesus is our judge
– he is the judge of our faith, and our faithful living.
But a judge over possessions?
Come on! Give him a break!
Note to self: If I have estate problems - Get a lawyer.
Jesus has got other fish to fry.
It must have been some legacy the old man left behind.
It had to have been quite an inheritance, one that required probate.
The nameless father probably thought he was helping out his two
sons.
Instead he left a legacy of bitterness and fighting between two
brothers.

The one son didn't come to Jesus grieving.
He came seeking a judgment against his brother.
All he wanted was his dad's stuff.
The lesson to be learned?
Don't leave behind enough for anyone to fight over.
It would be better to give it all away.

Jesus' only response is to tell a little story about a fool with overfilled barns - a fool who also had a history of cardio-vascular disease.
(And you didn't think God enjoyed irony?
That God doesn't have a sense of humor?)
Oh, yes, the fool played the mental gymnastics necessary to justify his actions.
"And I will say to my soul,
'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years;
relax, eat, drink, be merry.'"
I don't know about you;
His thoughts sound mighty familiar.
I do the same thing to justify my own greed and glutinous actions.
There seems to be no end to the creativity we employ
to justify our sinful and faithless behaviors.
And I suspect that I'm not alone.
The Gospel works for all of us.

Take my word for it.
God can see through our phoniness.
God can cut through
the line we feed others and
the lies we tell ourselves.
"God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being
demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they
be?'"
Fool?
Snap!
That's cold!
God can call me a lot of things, but "fool?"
Is that how I want to be known and remembered by God,
As "a fool?"

Fools are those who think that they own anything.
"The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."

We may possess things for a time,
but frankly,
there is simply a redistribution of wealth
with each successive generation.
God owns.

We are nothing more than mere stewards,
caretakers of God's stuff; the land, the wealth, the environment.
And we better do a good job of taking care of it;
Making sure there is enough to go around,
That every mouth is fed,
every person is sheltered and clothed,
Not destroying, not polluting, not endangering,
All-the-while ensuring that faith is deepened,
trust is broadened,
and that praise is given to God,
and God alone.

Fools are those who think that God has no claim on them.
Atheists are fools.

A-theistic people, that is, people who don't believe in a God, are fools.
I will not join in the debate, the denial, or the lies.
For I know from my own experience and from the truth of the
scriptures, that God places a claim on everyone.
Everyone has a divine purpose.
Everyone is called to fulfill that purpose.
Everyone is invited to recognize God's active participation in their life.
And everyone is expected to return thanks and praise to God.

In our experience, that claim comes to us through Jesus Christ.
Jesus is fully God, and fully human.
We are His disciples,
Called to carry out his work: spreading the Gospel and expanding His
Kingdom.
He is the head of the Church and we are his body.
He is the cup and the loaf, the new covenant.
And we are His people,
His chosen people.

"Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life
does not consist in the abundance of possessions."
Salvation isn't going to come by making bigger barns.

Salvation comes when we open wide the barn doors,
And invite in the hungry
To eat, be clothed, and to find shelter,
Sharing the abundance that God has already provided.
Salvation comes when we turn our backs on greed and gluttony,
When we turn our backs on bigger barns,
When we turn and face the Table of our Lord,
When we squarely face our Lord and embrace Him.
Salvation comes when we place our trust, our belief, our whole faith in
God, and in God alone.

Today, beloved members and friends of Zion,
We are being called to a different place:
We are being called to a Messianic Feast
Where there is room for everybody.
I will take my place at the table.
Won't you join me?
Amen.