

Written Copy: Luke 12:15 "Finding Meaning in Life"

8th Sunday @ Pentecost – Proper 13

Sunday, July 31st, 2022

Text: Luke 12:15

And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Exegetical Statement (the text's context)

Jesus' teaching on the Pharisees and scribes' false doctrine which will be revealed, and His call to acknowledge Him before men so they will be acknowledged before the Father who has the power to destroy souls in hell who deny the Spirit's witness of Him yet loves and cares for all who confess His name is interrupted by a question from the crowd. A man wants Jesus, in the role of Rabbi, to move his brother to fairly divide their inheritance with him. Jesus asks the man on what grounds he considers Jesus to be the one to fulfill this role. Then he warns all listening to guard themselves against making their lives about the love of and hoarding up of possessions. He illustrates the problem with this through a parable about a man blessed with wealth, who then is additionally blessed with bumper crops. He considers what to do with this abundance and decides to keep it all for himself by building bigger barns to store it all. He reasons in this way he will be set for life. But the God who gave him all he has comes and demands his very life of him. The man has been a fool for centering his life on earthly wealth yet having nothing to show for it eternally. The only treasure that really matters is the faith relationship those who are poor in spirit have with the God from whom all blessings flow

Focus Statement:

Everything we have is a gracious gift from God. And the greatest treasure is what we receive from the work of Christ Jesus on the cross to forgive all the ways we look to ourselves and our stuff to save us. In baptism He grants us a new life centered on Him. He works in us to put our desire for worldly possessions to death and give us daily a new life in Him, renewed in the knowledge of ourselves as His children who are to share and love others as Jesus did.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We can be tempted to see our abundance as belonging to us alone to be stockpiled so our future is secure at the expense of a faith relationship with God. On the other hand we can view our liberal sharing as making us right with God instead of our faith. Both paths end in death, and without faith we are like the fool, eternally lost.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Find our identity not in our possessions but in who possesses us by His Spirit, and seek to use His gifts to us, including the Gospel, to bless others in need.

Subject Sentence: All I have and am is a gracious gift of God thru Christ

Introduction

There once was a man who took a job out of high school as a bagger at the local grocery store. Where other men his age worked just hard enough to get by, this young man took his job seriously. He tried to be the quickest and most efficient bagger the store had. He was careful to put the heavy stuff on the bottom and the lighter stuff on top, and always to keep the bread and eggs separate. He was always ready and willing to do carry outs-load the customers groceries in the car for them. His dedication and seriousness concerning his work did not go unnoticed. The Store Manager soon promoted him to be a cashier, a position he excelled in, quickly becoming the fastest most efficient cashier the store had. From there he was promoted to the position of head cashier in charge of counting the other cashiers' tills at the end of the day, and training new cashiers. When they wanted to promote him to be a store manager he refused until he had a chance to learn what it took to do the job of every department in the store. He learned how to cut meat, clean and prepare fish, choose and stock produce, work in the bakery, unload the trucks and stock the shelves. By the time he became Store Manager he knew what it took to have a smooth and efficient operation. And his efforts showed in the increased number of people who chose to shop there.

He saved his money and eventually he was able to buy a store of his own. Using all the knowledge he had accumulated and his work ethic he was able to build that one store into a chain of grocery stores. Along with these stores he built a large warehouse so that he could buy items in bulk and make a better profit on them while still being competitive in pricing. He poured himself into his work, never taking time out to marry or have a family, thinking there would be time enough when he had firmly established his grocery store chain as the number one chain in the city. And he reached that goal, yet continued to press on to reach and surpass it. He looked to expand his operation across the Midwest and take on the national chains. But before he could reach that goal, one night, he went to sleep, and never woke up in the morning. He died without any heirs to take over his business, and without anyone trained to run it as he had. It only took a couple of years and his stores went bankrupt and were closed.

In the end what kind of legacy did this man leave? Not much. He strove to find success in the world but instead what did he really find? Solomon describes it in **Ecclesiastes 2:22-23** ²² **What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun?** ²³ **For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.** The end result of his life is vanity, or more accurately worthlessness-nothing to show for it. He spent his life chasing after the wind, something you can't even see, let alone try to catch it.

Gospel Reading

It's a modern-day version of the parable Jesus told in our Gospel Reading. A man who has already been blessed with wealth has a bumper crop of a harvest. It's more than he has room to store. So now he must make a decision on what he will do with the excess. He could give it away, after all he is already wealthy. Instead he decides that these excess crops are his crops. They need to remain with him to bless his future. He decides on his own accord to make his barns bigger to keep more of his crops for his future welfare. And we see how that turns out. **Luke 12:20-21** ²⁰ **But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."**

So it sounds like the mistake this man made, as well as our grocery store mogul, is that they kept it all for themselves. What if these men used their wealth to bless others? What if this rich farmer took his excess produce into town and gave it all to the poor, fed as many people as he could for free. Surely that would bring meaning to his life. But what if there is more need than even he can supply with his bumper crop? And no matter how much he gives away, no matter how many people he helps, there will still come a day when he dies. He might be remembered for a little while for his charity, but how long would it take, how many generations before he would be forgotten? Solomon's comment on life rings true in **Ecclesiastes 1:13-14** ¹³ **And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. ¹⁴ I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.** No matter what we do, or how much wealth we accumulate, or how many people we help we all have a date with death. And then what?

How should we view our life and its purpose? Jesus warns us in **Luke 12:15** **"Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."** We cannot find meaning and purpose to our life according to how much stuff we accumulate, or even how much stuff we give away. And that's a problem for many Americans because we judge who we are and where we fit into the world by how much money we have, how much land, how nice are the cars we drive, how fancy are the clothes we wear. We judge ourselves according to the neighborhood we live in, the education we have, where we work and how much we make. And in the end, when you die, none of these things will make any difference. If your life has been wrapped up in these worldly things, you are not rich towards God and your future will be eternally apart from Him in hell.

Solomon has a better way to view our lives. **Ecclesiastes 2:24-25** ²⁴ **There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God,** ²⁵ **for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?** What is the key to finding meaning and enjoyment in our lives? Seeing and understanding that everything we have is from the hand of God, given as His gracious gift that we have neither earned nor deserved. The man who built his own grocery store chain didn't do it alone; all the breaks he got, all the knowledge and skill he had, all were a gift from God Himself. The wealthy farmer in Jesus' parable owed that wealth to the Lord, who also the source of his field's producing bumper crops. All that we have and possess is a gracious gift from the Heavenly Father who provided the knowledge and the means for us to acquire it. And that includes the gift that is our very life itself. We did nothing to earn the right to live. Your life is a gracious gift of God Himself.

And what do we do with that most gracious gift? Do we always thank Him for it? Or do we see it and claim it as our own? We make decisions and run our lives as if we have final say over all things including all the other gracious gifts that fill our lives. By our thoughts, words, and actions we do not deserve the life we have now, let alone any kind of eternity except suffering apart from God's presence in that place where there will be eternal suffering and gnashing of teeth.

That's why we all desperately need the most gracious and wonderful gift God has to offer. This gift is far more valuable than anything you now own, including your life. It is the gift of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the gift of His life lived perfectly for us where He regarded everything as the Father's gracious gift to be shared with others in need. It is the gift of His very life itself given on the cross to forgive and cleanse you and me from all the ways we have tarnished and ruined God's gift of life to us by making our stuff and ourselves more important than Him. It's the gift of His death and His resurrection which assures us that His work of salvation was accepted by the Father. It is the gift of faith given you in baptism that makes Jesus' death and resurrection for you. It's the Spirit's continued work in us to make us die to sin and rise to a new life whenever we confess and hold fast to Christ's words of grace and forgiveness that are the absolution. It's the Spirit's continued work of recreating us so that we **(Colossians 3:10) put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.**

In baptism we have been given the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit who remains with us and continues to work on us to see life in a different way. Once we see God by faith as the Creator of all things, the Sustainer of all things, and the gracious giver of all things, that faith moves us to share our gifts with others through the same love and care that moves God to give it to us in the first place. He moves us to understand something that the Rich Fool in our Gospel Lesson never did, that the Lord provides the abundance in our lives so that we can graciously bless others in the same manner we have been blessed. The Spirit works to strengthen us in the life of the new self which is willing to give not just out of abundance but is also willing to make sacrifices of our time, talent, and treasure. We do this not to be saved, not to earn His grace and favor, because we cannot. But instead because of the all the wonderful gifts He has shared with us. And our new self, our new heart, desires to share them with others.

Conclusion

Luke 12:15 "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." How is it that we are to guard ourselves against the draw to covet worldly things? How do we protect ourselves from the innate desire in our hearts to have more and more, lusting after what is beyond that which God has allotted for us as our share? When we realize that all we have, and even our lives belong to God. When we confess that our life is not about what we hold in our hands but who is holding us. When we understand the meaning and purpose of our life is found in being a baptized child of God who has been given so many wonderful gifts, the best of all being forgiveness of sins, salvation from eternal damnation, and eternal life to come. Holding these things by faith is what it means to be rich toward God. And when our lives are full of richness toward God, we can't help but share that richness with those around us in need, especially that most precious of gifts which is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.