

Pent. 10 Proper 13, Luke 12:13-21—August 1, 2010- R. Prior**Prayer.**

“Take care! Be on your guard against all kind of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” I could sit down right now and just ask you to meditate on that verse in silence for about 10 minutes and it would be time well spent. But sadly, you’re not that lucky today.

Gordon Gecko in the movie Wall Street said “Greed is good” and made an impassioned plea for how it drives everything in that “greed makes the world go round” soliloquy. But you would feel like you hadn’t gotten your money’s worth if I affirmed that this morning. We like to condemn greed as a value and name all the ways it rears its ugly head in our culture, and they are numerous. But, do we want to do anything about it. That is the harder question. It has to do with how we define what it means to be foolish. This gospel parable is called the parable of the rich fool. One persons fool is another person’s hero, I guess.

. Jesus knew the power of money for people. We see it every day in the papers with people in business or government who take liberties or break laws to get assets that they think will assure their future. People commit treason, cut corners when it comes to public responsibility, empty corporate coffers, or cheat others. It is a formidable temptation-- to believe in and trust what you have accumulated.

The Colossians passage this morning joins the chorus—“Put to death therefore whatever is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).” Some would say that pretty much takes all the fun out of life and that is true if you look at life in a particular way. Colossians is talking about becoming new people baptized into Christ and living out of Christ. It is talking about living for others and not just ourselves.

Well the problem of course is that we are talking about a battle that we have to struggle with all the time and which has its hooks in us. If we are honest this whole business is a lot more complicated than a casual lip service condemnation of greed.

A comment on this passage in a recent Sojourners magazine said this:
“This teaching is urgent in our society. Not only because of the perennial seduction of greed, but because we live in a society of bad tax laws, bad credit arrangements, and bad advertising, all of which seek to make greed into a civic virtue. We know better! We may choose against such foolishness for a life of neighborliness.”

Maybe the really hard part is that constant gospel demand that we adopt a lifestyle and an outlook that is decidedly counter cultural and we are reluctant or afraid to do that.

In traditional terms greed falls under the general category of covetousness, i.e. **thou shalt not covet** in the Ten Commandments. Well how much are we really aware of our covetousness. When is the last time you even used or thought about that word? Probably not recently. Covetousness means not just envy or jealousy of others position or possession but the heart of greed which is “**wanting more of what you already have enough of...**” Think about that and applying that standard to your life and outlook. Pretty frightening, huh? Is to me? We have so much more than what we need. So little that we are really lacking especially when it comes to material goods. Yet look at where our energy and resources go.

Is life as the foolish farmer would have us believe simply about piling up possessions, being good 21st century American capitalists, being set for many years so we can say as he does: “relax, eat, drink, and be merry.” All our efforts are then in the service of hedonism and self gratification. Or, are we in some kind of spiritual rebellion against that notion, and if so.... What are we willing to do about it?

We can come to worship what we have. I have seen people who are more concerned about the state of their finances and their possessions, their image in the community than they are about the struggles of their children. People make themselves miserable about what someone else has

and take that as a measure of their own worth. Fools are not in short supply.

The Romans had a proverb which went: “Money is like seawater; the more you drink, the thirstier you become.” What if our outlook is not about acquisition but rather on seeing all that is as a gift from God to be enjoyed and shared and benefited from by all? What are the visions of justice inherent in that outlook that vary from the cultural norm of greed and self concern?

St. Augustine once said: “God tries to give but our hands are too full to receive.” That is at no time more true than today for many of us.

Martin Luther once said, “God divided the hands with finger so that money could slip through.” By that he meant that Christians need to approach wealth with a kind of detachment that neither disdains the accumulation of it nor leads them to covet or pervert its importance. We are to hold our wealth and possessions lightly through hands divided by fingers that allow possessions to slip through. We are to hold what we have generously as gifts to be delighted in but also to be used for the well being of others. What we have is a trust from God to be used to realize God’s vision of justice for our world.

This gospel provokes an attitude and perspective that puts wealth in its place. And when our lives are required of us, as in the parable what

we have will come in a distant second to who we are and what we believe and share.

Put simply when we discover that we are in bondage to our possessions it is time to sell off. OR it is time to reassess and reclaim our souls and our eternal inheritance because we can for sure never purchase it. Teresa of Avila once said, “The Lord never looks at the magnitude of what we do, only the love with which we do it.” What is of temporal value in this life and what is eternal, what do we hold and protect, and what do we give and ultimately keep?

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in a book called “The Strength to Love” addressed the parable of the rich fool in this way. He said:” The rich man was a fool because *he permitted the ends for which he lived to become confused with the means by which he lived.* The economic structure of his life absorbed his destiny. The tragedy of the rich man was that he sought the means first, and in the process the ends were swallowed by the means.”

You know I think we all live there. We struggle not to perhaps but the seductions and the attractions of having and getting of keeping and securing as so strong, aren't they? Well to be rich toward God doesn't mean we have to be poor or even devalue doing well. It does mean that we have to keep a very different perspective and outlook about what our

accomplishments and our wealth means and a very different outlook about what we think it can do for us and also what we believe it can do for others.

Don't be a fool about what you have done, what you have or have accumulated. Just be thankful to God that you have the ability to do it and share it with others in ways that will hopefully make life richer for everyone. I think that is the way we become rich toward God. Amen.