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July 31, 2022
The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:13-21
Ecclesiastes 1:2,12-14; 2:18-23
Psalm 49:1-11
Colossians 3:1-11

I want to start this morning with a simple meditation on our Gospel to help us center our hearts and minds on the questions in front of us. Because the teaching this week on money is not an easy one. It's an issue that I have witnessed over and over again break a part families and friends and communities.

And I want to suggest that the Biblical teachings this week are much more complex than just how we relate to money. They ask of us a deeper question...one that centers on what we might call the spirituality of possession. What are we willing to put our trust in...material gain or God? And, if you "win", if you get all of the toys...what is really gained at the end of the day, at the expense of your faith, of your relationships?

Listen to these words from Steve Garnaas-Holmes as we center our hearts and minds this morning...

*It's a simple choice, really,
one that should be easy.
Do we create need –
Building our lives around a void
that we feed and feed,
but is never satisfied;
Storing more than we will ever use,
to silence our fear,
while ignoring the cries of those we have left empty?*

Or

*Do we create plenty –
Finding satisfaction in enough,
finding joy in what can't be owned
and life in what is not for sale;
Seeking to share life and joy and food and wealth,
so that these blessings are multiplied,
and celebrated.*

*Teach us, Jesus, in our homes and families,
our communities and neighbourhoods,
our countries and continents,*

*to always make the simple choice
to create plenty
wherever and however we may.*

Amen.

What did you hear? What thoughts in this beautiful prayer stood out to you?

Holmes is offering that we face two choices as people of faith when it comes to our relationship with money. The first is fear, our fear of scarcity. And when scarcity becomes our Gospel we create immense emptiness...not only in our own hearts but in our relationships.

The second choice is joy – joy that is found when we trust that we already have enough. And not only do we have enough but we have the opportunity to magnify that same joy for others by setting aside our fear of scarcity. I love the line from the prayer...finding life in what is not for sale.

Finding life in what is not for sale.

Or as Jesus states in our Gospel, “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

In Luke, the brother in our story wants his inheritance. He is worried about his own status. He is worried that what he thinks is rightfully his will be taken away...money, land, resources. And so, he is making a case to Jesus and justifying what he feels he is due even if it comes at the expense of his brother.

Jesus doesn’t take the bait. He sees what’s in the man’s heart and frankly it isn’t good. And so Jesus tells the parable of the rich man who stores up his grain and builds barn after barn to insure his own future ease. “Now I can relax, eat, drink, be merry.”

The rich man got what he thought was security but in the parable God calls him one powerful word...God calls him a fool.

Why?

Well, think of all he has missed in his desire to secure his own comfort. He missed what others in his community might need. He missed caring for those who might have been important to him. He missed feeling a sense of awe and gratitude for the abundance around him. And most importantly, he prioritized his possessions, his grain, over prioritizing his trust in God. His spirituality of possession becomes self-centered and not God-centered.

Yes, he may have achieved power and security and ease but he did so at the expense of his own soul. He gave up God for greed.

Now, we often equate greed with money but the Gospel teaching reaches beyond our greed for simply monetary gain. We should think about greed in a broader sense...greed for power, influence, time, or even image. Greed of all kinds is manifested when our decisions and actions center on me, my and mine. When we set ourselves in opposition to other people out of fear for what we may lose.

That is what Ecclesiastes is referring to when the writer states that all is vanity and a chasing after wind. We will work and toil and stress and worry and at the end of the day, Ecclesiastes reminds us that we can't take it with us.

This is the saddest part of the story for me. Because at the end of our lives, how many of us, if we have lived with a mindset of scarcity will look back and realize all that we have truly lost? Love, beauty, kindness, joy. For what? A few extra stores of grain? Is it worth it?

And, make no mistake, just because you call yourself a Christian, just because you go to church or post some nice bible verses on Facebook does not make you immune to vanity. In fact, it may make us more susceptible because we have built an outward image of the good kind of Christian. We have said the right things. We have shown up at church. We have volunteered and done a lot of good. So, we rationalize what we deserve, what we've earned, what's rightfully ours. A little greed won't hurt anyone, right? In fact, most of us probably don't even think of our reaction to scarcity as greed or as something in opposition to our faith.

That's when we start to justify our actions as though we have a moral compass that protects us from the sin of greed. My guess is that the younger brother felt the same and so did the rich man. I'm a good person. I deserve these other things. I have a right to them.

But Jesus is asking us to look deeper into our hearts. Who are we in our souls? What is driving our need for more?

When God calls the rich man a fool, God is calling out how the man missed all of the goodness around him...the abundance of the land, the plentiful harvest, the rain, the sun. He missed the ability to share and to give and to share joy. He missed the chance to build community and to love his neighbor. He grew blind to beauty and to life.

Jesus teaches us to find life in what is not for sale. To set aside our fears and trust that we already have enough. It is at the end of the day a simple choice. Amen.