

Twenty-Second Sunday Ordinary Time - A 2017
Jer. 20.7-9///Rom. 12.1-2///Matt. 16.21-27

→a few weeks ago a news story appeared that caught my attention....it was about a woman named Beverly Mitchell....a 66 year-old woman who lived in Cheshire, Connecticut who was found dead in the basement of her home after neighbors had reported that she had not been seen for several days....

→when the police arrived and inspected her home...they discovered that the top floor of the house had collapsed into the basement level, crushing Ms. Mitchell under its weight.

→But even more disturbing was the cause of the collapse....it was from the sheer volume of possessions and collectibles stacked four to five feet high throughout the first floor of the house

→you see...Beverly Mitchell was a hoarder....unable to resist accumulating and storing more and more stuff...until every corner of her house was literally packed floor to ceiling.

→how tragic a story...when you think about it...because the very things that she thought gave her life....actually cost her her life. *PAUSE*

→now of course, the reason this story made the news is because the circumstances are rather bizarre...but at the same time...it also serves as a cautionary tale for all of us as well.

→we may not be classic hoarders, like Beverly Mitchell.

→at best.....most of us probably have a drawer in the kitchen that is hopelessly stuffed with an odd assortment of keys and dead batteries, and we might even have a cluttered garage or attic....

→but hopefully.....our clutter is nothing close to the point of threatening the structural integrity of the house....

→however.....most of us [these days] are prone to the temptation to want more, to spend more, to buy more and to store more than we really need

--[and] this yearning for “more” is the secret sauce that fuels and rewards advertising campaigns and sale strategies...

→we are told, pushed, pressured and coerced into believing that if we have the newest phone or the next generation technology, or the larger house, the newest car or the latest gadget...we will be happy...we will be the envy of our neighbors....we will be satisfied....

And we believe it!

PAUSE

→so we buy more and more...to the point that then we don't have enough room to store all of it...we buy a larger house so we can put everything in it...

→did you know that just 40 years ago the average size house in America was 1600 square feet...

→today...the average house is 2600 square feet....a 165% increase!

---and it's not because our families are getting larger...in fact the number of household members has dropped from an average family of 3.3 in 1960 to 2.5 today.

→i.o.w....we don't need larger houses to cradle our growing families as much as we need larger houses to cradle our growing collection of things.

→and to further illustrate this point...even larger homes are not sufficient for some today...because one of the booming and the fastest growing businesses these days is storage units.

→today in the United States there are over 58,000 storage facilities, with a total space of 2.3 billion square feet of storage....

--that's more than three times the total area of Manhattan...and it's all dedicated to storing....stuff....

→[and guess what] the owners of these facilities report that over 90% of the space is filled!

→so this is how we keep our main living areas from crashing down into our basements!

--however....there is the problem with this morbid craving for “more” –it is never enough....i.o.w. we are never satisfied...are we?

→and if left unchecked...our desires can morph in greed...

...our competitiveness can turn into envy...

...our appetites into obesity.....our selfishness into self-destruction

--like Beverly Mitchell, our lives can easily become snuffed out under the sheer weight of our insatiable craving for “more.”

→however...as we hear today...there is another way to live

--a path that leads to a true sense of abundance and freedom in life

--a way that Jesus speaks to in the reading we just heard.

→today we hear Jesus announcing to his disciples that he was headed to the cross to die///

--and in doing so, he then tells his followers that they too...must likewise be willing to sacrifice their own desires...their own egos...their own appetites...and even their own lives to know the way to the Kingdom...

→at first glance...these words sound so contradictory to everything we think and know on how to live a full and abundant life...

→at times as individuals, as a nation, as a people.....we think collecting and conquering is the way that leads to security

→dominance and accomplishment is the path to glory

→that self-preservation and acquiring possessions gives us value and worth.....

→but today Jesus tells us differently...

→in truth, when our primary goal is to get whatever we want or desire...we are prone to selfishness...

→when we try to protect our possessions...even with the latest security systems...we succumb to paranoia and insecurity....

---and so today....Jesus offers us a new solution... an antidote [if you will] to our desires and cravings for more....

→he tells his disciples and you and me...that instead of living for ourselves...we need to live for others...

→instead of thinking of our abundance as something to be hoarded or stored or protected at all cost....we should explore opportunities to share with others..

→instead of perhaps going through life with clenched fists...we might try living life with open palms....

---and I believe that is the true meaning behind the words of spoken by Jesus to his listeners when he says...

“whoever wishes to save their life will lose it but whoever loses their life will find it....”

PAUSE

→so many of us these days are trudging through life toiling under the weight of our accumulations and insecurities....like vacation travelers in airports with overstuffed luggage...

→we are consumed by what we have...by what we desire...by what we want

→think for a moment of all the things we have....and perhaps ask...does any of it truly make us happy?....

→and if that indeed is the case, then perhaps the words of Jesus today really do mean something for us today....

--to realize that less **really is** more.....

--that giving and sharing and providing **can be** more satisfying than getting and storing and acquiring...

→that life truly **is** measured not by the number of days we survive...but by the number of days we actually thrive...

PAUSE

→in the end...Jesus reveals to us today...a choice that needs to be made...

--if we live only for ourselves, protecting and padding our own comfort...we run the risk of being buried by the weight of all that we possess....

OR...we can choose to follow the path of service and generosity, self-sacrifice and kindness....giving and sharing....

For truly indeed....

“what good is there.....for one to gain the whole world...and in doing so forfeit their soul”