

Hosea 11:1-11

Psalm 107:1-9, 43

Colossians 3:1-11

Luke 12:13-21

In my kitchen is a momento from my own mother's kitchen. Hanging above the light switch is a sweet little frame that holds the following saying: "Life is uncertain. Eat dessert first!" That little saying conveys a lifetime of wisdom. Not one of us knows how long or how short our life might be. It's important to do the important things now. It's important to make each day special in whatever way we can. It's important to relish the gift of the present because it is a gift from God....and it is, in fact, the only time we have. Today will never come again. Today is the only day we have. Yesterday is a cancelled check never to be used again. Tomorrow is a promissory note. It may come. It may not.

Maybe the fragility of life is not the only thing that Jesus wants us to learn from the parable that he shares with us today. In answer to a young man shouting a request to Jesus that Jesus make his brother give him half of his inheritance, Jesus tells the parable about the foolish rich man.

Now there are any number of messages in this parable. To begin with Jesus is speaking directly to the young man who wanted half of the inheritance of his father. The obvious message from Jesus is that we shouldn't be greedy. We should take the portion allotted to us and be thankful for it.

But there are a number of other messages in this seemingly simple parable. It's important for us to notice that Jesus does not describe the rich man in derogatory terms. He doesn't imply that the man is rich because of ill-gotten gains. He doesn't imply that there is anything wrong with being rich or with being surprised and overwhelmed about the abundance of a bumper crop. There were plenty of patriarchs in the Old Testament who were beyond wealthy. Abraham is the most famous of God's very rich servants. The wealth itself is not the problem. The problem lies in how the rich man responds to his unexpected abundance.

Jesus tells us that 'the land of the rich man produced abundantly.' Jesus doesn't say that the man was a talented and hard-working farmer responsible for the bumper crop. Jesus clearly implies that God had produced the abundance. Looking around at all that he now has, the rich man begins to decide what he will do with all crops he hadn't expected. He realizes that he has no place to store them. So he says, "I'll tear down my barns" "I'll build bigger ones" "I'll store all my grain and goods in the bigger barns" and I will say to myself, "Soul, we have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."

Listen to what he is saying. I will tear down. I will build up. I will store. I will relax. I will eat, drink and be merry. I, I, I, I, Aye yi yi yi yi!!! It's all about 'I'. This rich man has fallen into the trap of worshipping not God, but the unholy trinity of me, myself, and I. His foolishness is not that he is preparing for the future. His foolishness is living only unto himself. He gives no thought to sharing what he's been given. It never crosses his mind that he could give some away to people who have nothing. It's all about him and what he needs and what he wants. So that's his first mistake.

There's nothing wrong with preparing for the future. Making financial plans for the future is good stewardship and God rewards good stewardship, but it shouldn't be a replacement for our need for God and our seeking after God and our responding to God. Our first realization needs to be that all that we have...materially, spiritually, emotionally and mentally is a gift from God. He is foolish not because he is preparing *for* his future but because he believes that his abundant possessions will *secure* his future. That's his second mistake.

All of us have been seduced by our own culture to believe that material things and material wealth will provide us with our heart's desire and make us safe. There is a constant barrage of messaging that tells us that this model car will make our life smoother and easier; this brand of food will make us healthy or slimmer; this brand of toothpaste will make us attractive to the opposite sex; and this cleaning product will make our homes spotless and sweet smelling. And all of us know that at one time or another we've taken the bait even if we know better. There's a little part of each of us that wants to be happier, more successful, admired, sought after, and envied. And emotionally we grasp material things which often do bring us momentary happiness, but as soon as the shiny wears off...as soon as the thing we longed for is familiar or worn out, those giddy feelings evaporate and we're back at square one looking for the next desired item to covet. In that respect, we too know that we can be fools because we know that what we chase after and long to possess is not going to bring us the lasting joy...the deep-down soul satisfying joy...that we actually crave. The false promise that we can meet our deepest needs materially has been embedded so deeply in our culture that all too often our response to disappointment with material goods is to shop some more. We even have a name for it. It's called Retail Therapy! And we know that it doesn't work! That's our mistake.

It's not that material abundance is bad in and of itself. But is it sufficient to meet our deepest needs? That's the question. Our wealth can provide us with a relative degree of comfort, but can it give us confidence that we are loved and honored by God? It can reduce our anxiety temporarily....and only temporarily... but can it put us in right relationship with God? Only after Jesus has exposed our greed and anxiety about money does he extend the invitation to step into a renewed relationship with God. It's not that God doesn't want us to have wealth. God just doesn't want it to be the 'be all and end all.' And we all know that any conversation about money is always about *more* than just money! God doesn't want it to be a distraction to us...a distraction that lures us away from our relationship with God. Worry, particularly worry about money, can be one of the biggest distractions of all...the one that lures us away from God the quickest. Jesus redirects us back to being rich toward God.

So what does it mean to be *rich* toward God? That's the question to ask. We know that one way of being rich toward God is in using our resources for the benefit of our neighbors. We need not only to think about this personally, but we need to consider it as a church as well. As a congregation is our giving driven by our sense of mission or is our sense of mission limited by our giving? Lest we forget, Jesus has given us the story of the Good Samaritan. We know what Jesus wants us to do.

Being rich toward God also means listening intently and intentionally to the words of Jesus just as Mary did while sitting at his feet. Listening to Jesus and to God can come in the form of quiet time in prayer when we stop speaking. It can also come in the reading of scripture and in finding out what a passage of

scripture actually means. And it can come in prayer-filled conversations of Christians together seeking to hear and understand God. Jesus has promised that whenever two or three are gathered together in His name, He will be among them. And we know that Jesus keeps his promises.

Perhaps most importantly, being rich toward God means cultivating an attitude of trust that allows God to reveal himself in both quiet and spectacular ways. We need to focus less on self-reliance, despite what our culture teaches us, and focus more on letting go and letting God. Sometimes we have such a tight grip and stranglehold on our lives that God scarcely has any wiggle room. Whatever weighs on our hearts...whatever keeps us from enjoying the many blessings that God has already provided for us...whatever distracts us from keeping our eyes and hearts on God...these are the things to take to God in prayer. This is how to be rich toward God. God has the strength when we don't. God has the vision when we don't. God has the energy when we don't. God has the power when we don't.

When we trust God, even when we can't figure out what God is doing, when we do see God at work in our lives, we realize that God has answers we have never even thought about.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.