

Luke 12:13-21

Greed... the readings today all seem to be about greed. Solomon, the writer of Ecclesiastes thinks that because he can't take what he has on this earth with him, it is in vain to toil. In writing to the Colossians Paul named greed idolatry, and the wealthy man considered building larger barns to hold his crop, then dies during the night.

Leo Tolstoy told a story about a man who was given the opportunity to own however much land he could walk the parameter in one day, from sunup to sundown, if he finished where he began. If he walked a square mile, he would be given a square mile of land free, if he could walk the parameter of 20 acres, he would be given 20 acres free and clear. So, he rose early in the day and started off at a fast pace, walking as far as he could. As the day began to wear on, he realized he had gone much further than he had planned. Not wanting to lose the chance at this free land he picked up his pace and headed toward the starting point. He was exhausted, but not wanting to lose the chance of a lifetime he began to run as he saw the starting point in view. Just as the sun was dipping below the horizon, he reached the starting point and collapsed. His efforts to gain this free land took his life, and he ended up with nothing. At first thought we might think that the greed this man had for land is the same as the greed the man in the parable had for his crop, however when we look closely at what the man in today's parable is doing, it isn't too different from the way a wise person would handle their finances in today's world. He works hard, he is focused on his future, planning for his retirement, making sure he can have what he needs to make it through the rest of his life. What's wrong with that? Jesus asks, in verse 20, "And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

If you noticed, the man, when overseeing his abundant produce never thinks of anyone other than himself, "What should I do... I have no place... I will do this, I will, I will, I will..." In fact his produce has become his purpose in life, he has idolized it.

Jesus told this parable to respond to the question of money. A man is looking for a fair way to split an inheritance between two brothers. Jesus isn't going to get into the middle of the inheritance question, instead he tells the parable that basically says money isn't everything. Where we spend eternity is of more importance than the things we own.

It may seem as though Jesus doesn't want us to have money or possessions but that isn't exactly true. What Jesus doesn't want is for us to have the *love* of money. Jesus doesn't want us to be so consumed with money and material possessions that we forget who made it possible for us to have them in the first place; and Jesus doesn't want us to focus on what we can do for only ourselves with money. Because when we get hooked on money and the things it can buy us we will never be happy with what we have, we will always be looking for something more.

The alternative to greed is generosity. St. Jerome, in about 400 A.D., mentioned in a letter he was writing, a woman who "preferred to store her money in the stomachs of the needy than in her purse." It is all right to make investments, as long as we understand that the best investment that we can make is in the Kingdom of God. I know many of you are very generous. You have donated so much to people in need, you have cleaned out your extra possessions and donated them to raise money for the boiler fund. You are never ones to say, "I have given enough," when it comes to giving for special projects for those who are in need,

such as school supplies, food donations, health kits, quilt making. When a need presents itself, you are the ones who say, "I can help. I have enough that I can give some away."

But the question is, why? Are you giving out of generosity because it's the right thing to do, or are you giving out of generosity to enlarge the Kingdom? And what difference does it make? Because where we spend eternity is more important than the reason we don't idolize what we own. We can give because it makes ourselves feel better. We can give simply because we see a need and we have a means of helping. *Or* we can give because it is what Jesus expects of us.

Colossians tells us to, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory." When our mind is with Christ, when we live Christ-like lives we think of others because Jesus thinks of others. Paul, when he says that "you have died" means that we have left behind our earthly self and have given our hearts to Jesus so that when Jesus returns we will be known as his own. Where we spend eternity matters.

Paul challenges us with the words: "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (3:2-3). Set your minds not on the temptations of this world, but on the joy of life with Christ, a life in which we are free to enjoy boundless compassion, kindness, love, peace and gratitude. We can do this because we have been given a new and abundant life that is safe and secure and hidden with Christ in God. Those who are "in Christ" have "died" to this world - died to what Paul calls "the elemental spirits of the universe" (2:20).

Being generous because God has given enough to share helps to acknowledge the fruit of the spirit Paul lists here: compassion, kindness, love, peace, and gratitude. Another way to acknowledge the fruit of the spirit is to create a gratitude journal. Every day write down 3 things that you are grateful for such as, "I am grateful my husband fixed all the meals yesterday", "I am grateful for my friendship with Carla." "I am grateful for my vacation with my siblings." When we focus on what we have to be grateful for that is not a possession, we are less likely to focus on the worth of our possessions but rather on things that are far more valuable, like our relationships with other persons and our relationship with God; where we see kindness; where we were compassionate, where we find love. These are much more important than focusing on how much we have, how we can own more, and how we can protect what we own. When generosity and gratitude are our way of life we will understand what truly is important, nothing is more important than the kingdom of God.

All glory be to God.