

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, August 04, 2019
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Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23 : Colossians 3:1-11 : Luke 12:13-21
Preparing for The Future

The Gospel reading this morning takes place Just after one of the run-ins that Jesus had with the Pharisees. Jesus had just accused them of putting a greater emphasis on keeping minor points of the law such as tithing, while ignoring the major points of the law such as justice and loving God. As the crowds began to gather, Jesus turned his attention towards them and back to his disciples. He began to warn them about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and instruct them on preventions from becoming hypocrites. If they were going to be righteous, they would need to give of themselves to God first and then do their acts of righteousness to please God. He was encouraging his disciples to confess their faith in God even when under duress and to not be afraid. The Holy Spirit would be with them always to protect them.

Into the middle of Jesus' teaching a man breaks in with a question. It doesn't matter that Jesus has been speaking of eternal truths. The man is concerned with his own issues and is not listening to Jesus. His father had died, and his brother was refusing to follow the commandments of the law which specified a certain division of the estate. That he should ask Jesus' opinion is not surprising. Rabbis were often sought out to give rulings on points of law, including those related to family money matters. But when the man asks his question, he was not asking for a ruling, he had already decided what his rights were. He wanted Jesus to enforce that decision. "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Jesus declines to get involved. Instead he gives the man, and the crowd, an answer which came in the form of a parable, the story of "the rich fool".

The wheat in the fields of a rich landowner had produced a bumper crop. So much wheat that the barns he already had would not store what the land had produced. There was surplus everywhere. So, the man takes the drastic step of tearing down the barns he already had and build new larger ones to house the bumper crop that was now his. He was probably following what he had learnt from other individuals of his people's past.

Didn't Joseph do the same thing when he was made steward over all the land of Egypt. Joseph saves the day by predicting seven years of bounty and seven years of famine. Joseph stores the extra harvest from the seven years of plenty and redistributes it during the seven years of famine

When the Israelites were in the wilderness on their way out of Egypt, God told Moses to gather twice as much manna on the sixth day so that they could rest on the Sabbath. Ever after, Israel followed the practice of leaving the land fallow every seventh year as to give the land its "Sabbath", a chance for the land to recover. This is still in practise today with some crops.

Great blessing implies responsibility to see that there will be enough to go around. Preparing for the future by preserving the bounty one has today. Isn't this what we are encouraged to

strive for? Isn't it wise and responsible to save for the future? Isn't this what the rich farmer was doing? He seemed to have things figured out. He has worked hard and saved wisely. Now he can sit back, relax, and enjoy the fruits of his labour. So why is the man a fool?

From a certain perspective the man is doing nothing wrong. There's been no graft or theft, no mistreatment of workers. He is not a crook. He is simply a very fortunate man who has become even more fortunate and who is now being very careful and conservative so as not to lose everything he has gained.

One could easily argue that the rich man is a wise and responsible person. He has a thriving farming business. His land has produced so abundantly that he does not have enough storage space in his barns. So, he plans to pull down his barns and build bigger ones to store all his grain and goods. Then he will have ample savings set aside for the future and will be all set to enjoy his golden years.

But from Jesus' point of view, the man had one fault and it's a big one. He begins to think that the blessings he had been given were his own. "And I will say to My soul, 'Soul', you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry"

The rich farmer appears to live only for himself, and because he believes that he can secure his life with his abundant possessions. When the rich man talks in this parable, he talks only to himself, and the only person he refers to is himself: "What should *I* do, for *I* have no place to store My crops?" "*I* will do this: *I* will pull down My barns and build larger ones, and there *I* will store all My grain and My goods.

He is hoarding the miracle that has happened to him through no merit of his own for his own pleasure and security. He refuses to share it with his neighbours. He has missed the meaning of what has happened. He assumes that the harvest is his to reap for his own benefit so that he will have more than enough for himself and himself alone.

He expresses no sense of gratitude to God or to the workers who have helped him plant and harvest this bumper crop. He has more grain and goods in storage than he could ever hope to use yet seems to have no thought of sharing it with others, and no thought of what God might require of him. He is blind to the fact that his life is not his own to secure, that his life belongs to God, and that God can demand it back at any time.

Like the rich farmer, we might be tempted to think that having large amounts of money and possessions stored up will make us secure. Sooner or later, however, we learn that no amount of possessions can secure our lives.

But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

What happens to the man isn't a punishment from God. The message of the parable is not that God doesn't like people who work hard and are successful. What happens to the farmer is not a denial of any of the good, loving, charitable actions which may have characterized his life. The

last lines of the parable are simply an observation of the way life is for all of us, rich and poor, successful or struggling. This is one of those facts of life.

Jesus is letting us understand that material possessions will never stay with us when we die so why do we try to kill ourselves over it. If we are financially free, that's great as God wants his children to be prosperous. However, no amount of wealth can protect us from a health issue, or from a tragic accident. No amount of wealth can keep our relationships healthy and our families from falling apart. In fact, wealth and property can easily drive a wedge between family members, as in the case of the brothers fighting over their inheritance at the beginning of this text.

No amount of wealth can secure our lives with God. In fact, Jesus repeatedly warns that wealth can get in the way of our relationship with God. "Take care!" he says. "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions".

The Romans had a proverb: "Money is like seawater; the more you drink the thirstier you become". Yet money, or the things which money secures, are a passion for many people. Howard Hughes made more than a billion dollars in his lifetime and J. Paul Getty made several billion. It was much more than either could possibly spend. If you spent a thousand dollars an hour, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year, you'd need over 110 years to spend that billion. In other words, it's impossible, so why the drive to pursue more money when they already had more than they could count, let alone spend? Surely not happiness since each of them became more unhappy as their wealth increased. By the way, according to Wikipedia, there are 2,153 billionaires in the world today, the richest having 131 billion.

It is not that God doesn't want us to save for retirement or future needs. It is not that God doesn't want us to "eat, drink, and be merry" and enjoy what God has given us. We know from the Gospels that Jesus spent time eating and drinking with people and enjoying life. But he was also clear about where his true security lay.

When the bible talks about being rich towards God, it is not emphasizing possessions. Being rich toward God means storing his word as a treasure in our hearts. God is not only praised when we sing to him but also when we keep his words and follow them. That's being rich to God.

True wealth is to know and love the Lord. Authentic richness is to know His sovereign care. Genuine contentment is to anticipate eternity in the presence of the Lord Jesus, knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Planning for the future is all about priorities. It is about who is truly God in our lives. It is about how we invest our lives and the gifts that God has given us. It is about how our lives are fundamentally aligned: toward ourselves and our passing desires, or toward God and our neighbour, toward God's mission to bless and redeem the world.

This is the only way by which both the world and God are honoured; and that is to recognize that there is no mine or yours, anymore than there is just you or just me. We are in this together; if we ever hope to learn what it truly means to belong to one another, then it will happen not by seeing how much we can continue to store up for ourselves but how we need to distribute the abundance with which we have been blessed with all who have less.

Life is not about being rich in possessions for oneself: life is being rich toward God. Our life should not consist of desiring possessions; rather, it should consist of desiring God. There is nothing wrong with making plans and increasing one's wealth, as the farmer intended to do, but this must be done in consideration of God and His will. God's will be that we love God and love our neighbours. God gave us the greatest gift, Jesus Christ, His son. God gave us the gift of salvation. We should take the time to focus on this awesome gift. We should focus on the love of God and on God's greatest gift to us. Let us remember to be rich toward God in all our life as God has been so rich to us

I leave you with another story of two brothers. A very rich man died and left his inheritance equally to his two sons. Now one son had married young in life and had a large and happy family. The other was still a bachelor. The night after the division of the estate the single man sat thinking in his living room. "Why did my father make such a mistake? Here's my brother, with all those mouths to feed, so many to provide for and no real joy in it. While I'm quite comfortable, I've got more than I could ever use. Why divide the estate equally?" The other brother, when the children were tucked in bed and his wife was off at some project of her own mused: "Why would my father divide the estate equally? Here I am, surrounded by a loving family and all that joy, while my brother sits alone over in his house. I have my family to care for me, while he will need financial security for his future. Why divide the estate equally?" So, each man, that very night, resolved to place the majority of his inheritance in a suitcase and take it over and hide it where the other brother would find it and use it. As they were doing just that, they met between their two homes and realizing what each had intended fell into one another's arms, meeting in love as their father had hoped they might. Thanks be to God. Amen.

You shall cross the barren desert, but you shall not die of thirst. You shall wander far in safety though you do not know the way. You shall speak your words in foreign lands, and all will understand. You shall see the face of God and live. *Be not afraid. I go before you always. Come and follow me, and I will give you rest.* If you pass through raging waters in the sea you shall not drown. If you walk amid the burning flames, you shall not be harmed. If you stand before the power of hell and death is at your side, know that I am with you through it all. *Be not afraid...* Blessed are the poor, for the kingdom shall be theirs. Blest are you that weep and mourn, for one day you shall laugh. And if wicked men insult and hate you all because of Me, blessed, blessed are you!

Surely Jesus was not contradicting the lessons learnt from Joseph and Moses stories. He continually told his followers that he was not here to contradict the old testament but to enhance it's meaning for us. "Do not think that I have come to **abolish the law** or **the prophets**; I have come not to **abolish** but to fulfil.