

Shepherd by the Sea, Gualala
Sermon, Pastor Vernon Holmes
8th Sunday after Pentecost, August 4, 2019

Grace and peace be yours from God our sovereign and from our Lord and savior, Jesus the Christ; and from the life giving Holy Spirit. Amen.

I recall the very first prayer that I ever memorized as a child from Sunday School. It went:

“Only one life, will soon be past;
only what’s done for God will last.”

But it would take a lifetime of study and reflection until I came to understand and readily embrace the reality that this was not a prayer about some pie in the sky, go to heaven when you die kind of piety. It’s about life, here and now. Once you come to understand the full implications of the parable on the last judgement in Matthew 25, it all falls into place.

In that parable Jesus says:

*for I was hungry and thirsty, and a stranger, and naked, and sick, and in prison. And **You** gave me food, **you** gave me something to drink, **you** welcomed me, **you** gave me clothing, **you** took care of me, and **you** visited me.'*

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and thirsty, and a stranger, and naked, and sick, and in prison. and gave you food, and something to drink and welcomed you, and gave you clothing, and visited you?'

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

The simple truth of the parable and of the prayer is that in at least some respects, God and neighbor are one. So that the prayer may well have said:

Only one life will soon be past,
only what’s done for neighbor’s will last.

That is the truth of the Gospel. So let’s return to today’s text and look at it from that perspective. A text that begins with a family dispute over wealth, which provides the occasion for a pointed teaching from Jesus, this is followed by a parable about a rich man and his wealth. It then concludes with a second saying from Jesus. So, Let’s take a look at the text.

It begins with a family feud over personal wealth as someone asks Jesus to **“tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.”** This opens the door for Jesus to respond with a teaching **“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”** and that is followed by a parable about a rich man.

The parable begins: **“The was a rich man whose land produced abundantly.”** Perhaps the first thing we should note about this parable is that it does not stand alone. In Luke’s gospel, it is one of three related parable. The other two are found in Luke 16 verses 1 and 19 respectively. And they both begin with... **“There was a rich man who....”**

In between those two parables is the saying about the impossibility of serving both God and money, which is

followed by an attack on Pharisees whom Jesus calls “*lovers of money.*”

The second thing we should note about today’s parable is that Jesus clearly states the gifted-ness of nature saying ... “*a rich man’s land produced abundantly*”. But apparently the man had no concept of God’s gracious gift of life.

In Deuteronomy 8, after a long list of all that God had done for the Israelites from the exodus through the wilderness wanderings and the passage into the promised land....Moses says to them:

Beware that....When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God,...Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth". Deut. 8:12-14,17

Returning to the parable in our text, we next find the rich man having a dialog with **himself**. He is having a dialog with his soul about the very thing that is rotting his soul...**and he can’t even see it**. Psalm 14:1 says: ***Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."***

So the rich man doesn’t pray to God about it, rather he dialogs with himself, thinking:

'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. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'

Contrast Jesus, who eats and drinks with the poor vs the rich man who eats and drinks with himself. The very thing that could build community and shatter his loneliness,the thing that could serve the common good... the rich man could not or would not see.

Finally, in spite of the rich man’s denial concerning the way of God, or even the very presence of God, this parable ends with a dramatic twist. Suddenly, God is speaking. The rich man is no longer alone. ... He may not be listening...**but God is talking!**

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?'

Following the Parable the lesson concludes with this second teaching from Jesus:

"So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

What if Jesus really means it?

It seems to me that the key to this lesson is found in the triad of parables concerning. “*...a rich man who....*” All of them were deaf towards the words of the prophets and of Jesus concerning possessions. All were blind towards the “Abundant Life,” the life which Jesus says in the gospel of John, is the very reason for which he came into our world.

In the epistle lesson for today Paul encourages us to put away things that make us deaf and blind towards God. He says: “***Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desires, and greed....***”

Concerning the rich man in our parable for today, He is having a dialog with his soul about the very thing that is rotting his soul...**and he can't even see it.**

Can we see it?

As we look at our world today with its growing discrepancy between the haves and the have nots, Can we see with its:

- increasing homelessness, and
- it's vast population of uninsured or under insured families,
- with what amounts to concentration camps for children on our Southern border
- when full time workers teachers, among others, cannot even qualify to rent a two bedroom apartment in the communities they serve,
- When the pain of the world surrounds us..

can we see the very thing that is rotting our soul, and the very soul of our society? Can we see?

Can we see the narrative of this world with it's advertizing that says "**you are NOT okay**" and this world offers you everything that what you need to fix it. The average American hears that message 1800 times every day, compared to hearing the Gospel of Christ maybe once a week.

The Gospel calls us not to the broken life offered by this world, with it's rapacious ethics of buying and selling and it's economy of scarcity. The Gospel calls us to the ethics of receiving and giving and it's economy of Abundance.... An abundant life offered through Christ. An abundant life that is found in the Fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So when we consider our abundance, are we like the rich man in the parable, who only could think of himself and build a bigger barn, a grander retirement plan, a more palatial house, a more opulent car... or do we pause and thank God for our ability to work and to partake of the goodness of God's world. I'm afraid that all too often, we read the gospel as if we had no money, and we spend our money as if we know nothing of the gospel.

The voice of the prophets and the teachings of Jesus leave us with a certain awareness that there is more we must do than decry what we do not like. We must also teach the truths of life, the why of the unjust situation, the downside of the present situation, the will of God for the world that is being violated in the present situation. Most of all, we must also describe and work towards the world that must be put in its place.

There are three things we can do in the face of economic and cultural injustice:

We can:

- feel bad about it,
- do acts of charity.
- or we can work for justice.

We see with fear and trembling, our aching world in need, confessing to each other, our wastefulness and greed.

May we with steadfast caring, the hungry children feed.

We are called to follow Jesus, and let God's justice flow through us.

Amen

