

Lectionary 19C 2019, Luke 12:32-40, August 11, 2019, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Lancaster, PA, Kurt S. Strause

In last week's gospel reading Jesus told us the parable of the rich man, sitting fat and happy on top of his pile of money who decided the best thing to do would be to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. The parable ends with God telling the foolish man that tonight his life would be required of him and then the question, "all these possessions, whose will they be?"

Today's gospel serves as a conclusion to the parable we heard last week. "Do not be afraid, little flock." And then Jesus goes on to talk about his favorite topic. He speaks about it more often than politics, more often than sex, more often than family. He's talking about what each and every one of us holds dear to our heart. Our money.

So, this morning we hear it again. "Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

I wish I could say Jesus was speaking symbolically here; you know, not really meaning sell my possessions. I like my possessions. I get a nice feeling when I sit back and look at what I have. It would be difficult for me if I ever had to part with any of them. Maybe I could put a little emotional distance between myself and my possessions, but Jesus, can't I get to keep them?

Truth is, Jesus means every word of it. The very early church took Jesus at his word. We hear from the book of Acts how early Christians sold their possessions and put everything into a common treasury. From that treasury everyone received a daily allowance, their "daily bread." But it never really lasted very long. And except for a few religious orders over the centuries who try to live in simply and close to poverty, Christians have been compromising these words of Jesus ever since. If we tried to live like the early followers of Jesus the church would need to take care of the physical needs of all its members. In some tightly-knit church communities that's precisely what happens. The Amish here in Lancaster or the Bruderhoff communities in the mid-west commit themselves to the physical well-being of their members. Their insurance policies consist of counting on other members of the community to come to their aid if they get really sick, or a barn burns down or they lose their livestock.

OK, I'm not here this morning to make you feel bad that you don't follow completely the will of our Lord. But I think we need to recognize we live in a compromise, and that we should at least feel the tension between what Jesus commands and how we actually live our lives in relation to these things we call possessions.

Jesus' command to give away everything comes in relation to his words, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." I had a teacher who once said, "show me a person's check register and I'll show you where their heart is." Check registers are nowadays Old School. But look at your credit card statement, or bank statement and you can see the same thing. It's true. Take a look at how you spend your money and you'll quickly see what you value in life; the things, projects, products, charities you value. Those items indicate, in a true fashion, where your heart is fixed.

When Jesus is telling his followers to sell everything and give it all away he's saying that where you send your money your heart is going to follow. In fact, the best way towards spiritual growth, according to Jesus, is through a radical reorientation of your relationship with your possessions. Jesus doesn't want us to be possessed by our possessions, but the other way around. He wants to possess us, wholly and completely, and he won't allow anything to get in the way. Even our possessions.

For you see, we will have everything we need. "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Our earthly possessions cannot compare to the kingdom that is going to be ours and is already ours here and now. By the grace of God we are already given this kingdom of grace and forgiveness. It is ours, promised at our baptism, made real each time we gather to receive the Lord's Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins, sealed for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus. These are the possessions Jesus bids us to cling to with all our heart. He doesn't want anything to distract us, anything to get in the way. He loves us with a passionate, single-minded love, not caring if we are rich or poor, but only for our hearts which he wants for his own.

When our hearts keep first things first the secondary things fall in line behind them. When our hearts keep the love of Christ first in our lives our money takes its rightful place as secondary. As I said last week Christians are to keep a detached view of their possessions, never allowing them to possess us. For Christ possesses us. We are his, everything we have and are belong to him.

When all that you shall ever need is already promised to you, you can look at what you have through new eyes. Jesus promises us the kingdom of God which surpasses everything we own here. The temptation to put our trust in our possessions, to find our security there, is met by an even greater promise, "yours is the kingdom of God." Our future is certain, because Jesus lives. All fear is banished, all worries put aside because Jesus gives everything we need. Amen.