

Sermon Proper 13 Year C

[RCL] Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23; Psalm 49:1-11; Colossians 3:1-11;
Luke 12:13-21

Rich toward God

Right now in the world there is lots of tension on the issues of income and wealth inequality. I am not an economist or social scientist so I will not get into these complicated aspects. However, This Sunday's scriptures do offer us some reflection from a Christian perspective.

Jesus has taught us the two great commandments; the first is to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. The second is to love our neighbor as ourselves.

“Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” Jesus tells the two brothers who are in dispute of the family inheritance. Jesus reminds them that life is not about owning, or possessing things abundantly. We are to love God wholeheartedly and not to worship possessions as idols.

To emphasize his point, Jesus tells these two brothers the parable of a rich man whom he also calls as a fool, the “rich fool”. This rich man had the blessings of abundant harvests. The produce is so abundant that he does not have enough space to store them. With this abundance, what does this rich man do? The scripture tells his only concerns are “I” and “my.” In his whole thought process, it is only he himself that is in the center. It shows he only loves himself.

We have a few issues here: greed, rich, and fool.

In the Epistles to the Colossians, the author admonishes that “Put to death, whatever in you is earthly: ... greed (which is idolatry). (Colossians 3: 5)

Greed is defined as “a selfish and excessive desire for more of something (as money) than is needed” by Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

Is desiring for more of something than is needed really bad? Don't we all want to have abundance? Don't we all want to have a little leftover money to cushion ourselves in times of need? Isn't that why we contribute to pension fund, to have 401K, 401C, for our retirement?

I don't think it is when one prepares for rainy days, or stores up one's abundance that causes Jesus to call us fools, or does he condemn wealth.

It is the selfish and excessive desire for oneself that becomes greed. It is the way we treat our abundance and our wealth that matters to God.

Jesus further says, “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.” These people end up with spiritual death.

Who are those who are not rich toward God?

Often times, when we mention rich, we think of money, wealth. In the Bible, there are at least fifty times that money, wealth, possession or finances have been mentioned. They are mostly based on the basic commandments that “Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.”

When we love God, we are rich toward God. When we love our neighbor, we are rich toward God. It is because we show gratitude to God of the blessings bestowed to us.

This rich man forgets about God, the one who gives him all the blessings he has. God gives him the talents to grow the crop and receives the produce abundantly. Whatever God gives will eventually be returned to God. Isn't that what the Teacher tells us in Ecclesiastes?

“I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me.” (Ecclesiastes 2:18) He can't take all the possessions

with him, neither can we.

Isn't this rich man a fool by hoarding all the produce and thinks he can enjoy it into eternity? He does not know his last day on earth is coming soon. And neither do we.

This man's rich in produce can be rich toward God by showing God his gratitude. He can show God his gratitude by sharing his abundance with his neighbors who may not have such blessings but are struggling in their lives. He forgets he should love God with his whole heart, whole mind, whole spirit, and whole strength. He forgets he should love his neighbors as himself.

Isn't this one of the issues of the inequality of income and wealth of the contemporary world? The rich hoard the abundance without showing their gratitude to the creators. Not only do they not love their neighbors by not helping them out but they oppress them so as to hoard more wealth.

Who doesn't want to be rich? Who doesn't want to be the 1%? Isn't that why we want to go to Ivy League schools, to study hard and to work hard and be successful? However, when we get rich, will we be the rich fool? Or will we rich toward God?

The following list has been around in the cyberspace and is something that captures what Jesus said in the Gospel. I would like to share part of it in conclusion.

Things God won't ask on that day:

- 1 God won't ask what kind of car you drove. God will ask how many people you gave a lift to who didn't have any transportation.
- 2 God won't ask the square footage of your house. But God will ask how many people you welcomed into your home.
- 3 God won't ask about the clothes you had. God will ask how many you helped to clothe.

- 4 God won't ask what your highest salary was. But God will ask if you compromised your integrity to obtain it.
- 5 God won't ask what your job title was. God will ask whether you performed your job to the best of your ability.
- 6 God won't ask how many friends you had. God will ask how many people to whom you made sure you were a friend.
- 7 God won't ask in what neighborhood you lived. But God will ask how you treated and behaved with your neighbors.

Amen.

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