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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, August 4, 2019
8th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 18/Proper 13/Year C
Primary Text: Luke 12:13-21
Sermon Title: “Don't Be a Fool!”

Theme

In God's reign, the “rich will be sent away empty.” Jesus uses a parable to warn against identifying the worth of one's life with the value of one's possessions rather than one's relationship with God.

Text

¹³Someone in the crowd said to [Jesus,] “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” ¹⁴But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” ¹⁶Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ ¹⁸Then he said, ‘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. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰But 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?’ ²¹So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

Sermon

The Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, from which our First Reading came, was written somewhere between 450 and 200 BCE, and is attributed to King Solomon, King David's son, but nowhere does the author identify himself. It is of the Biblical category of wisdom literature and it is thought to be the musings of a king of Jerusalem as he relates his experiences and draws lessons from them, often self-critical. If a singular theme was attributed to Ecclesiastes it might well be, one should enjoy the simple pleasures of daily life such as eating, drinking, and taking enjoyment in one's work, which are gifts from the hand of God. The book concludes with the injunction: "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone" (12:13).

So given that a person had reached the high position of king, he must have learned something along the way, and so what does this passage that is our First Reading teach us?

**²Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.**

Honestly, the tone of this particular passage is dreary. It is as if we are ants. You've watched ants before, right? They just scurry about doing their ant thing, but to us it looks pretty random and pointless.

My parents raised me to consider a career. Think about what you would like to do, get an education, and then pursue it. Save money, get married, buy a house, have kids, retire well. Does this sound familiar to any of you? It is the path I am on.

But this passage from Ecclesiastes makes it sound like none of that matters. The author wrote and I paraphrase, "I hated what I had to do to make a living and when I die my thankless kids get it all and they will squander it."

I actually knew a guy, who is deceased now, whose story fits this reading from Ecclesiastes exactly. He was a self-made man and at the end of his life he had amassed three or four businesses worth tens of millions of dollars that had been set up in trusts to provide for his loved ones and his employees. But within a couple of

years of his passing, his heirs and their attorneys dissolved the estate and sold the companies – exactly what he did not want to happen.

Vanity of vanities,
All is vanity.

What to do? Well, it turns out that the other two readings give us some answers. In the Gospel reading from Luke, Jesus was interrupted by an angry person who felt like his brother was taking advantage of him in the settling of family's estate. Listen to me carefully, I have seen it time and time again. It doesn't matter if an estate is worth \$100 or a \$1M – families often behave badly, fight over it and then never speak to each other again.

Jesus' response was not what the man wanted to hear. Jesus told him to beware that greed was taking over his life. And then he told the Parable of the Rich Fool in which the subject had amassed so much material wealth that he actually built a bigger barn to store it all in, and to what end? He died.

Maybe you've seen this bumper sticker, "The one who dies with the most toys wins."

I've heard a response to that, "The one who dies with the most toys ... still dies."

Jesus would have another response, "The one who dies with the most toys ... has wasted a lifetime."

At the conclusion of the parable Jesus was very clear about what godly people should do, and that is to do the work that makes us rich toward God – said another way, invest yourselves in God by doing the godly things that reveal the glory that is Christ in you.

Jesus said it another way in the Sermon on the Mount when he said

Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves

do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

And the apostle Paul whole-heartedly agreed when he wrote Colossians. This passage that is our Second reading is the play book for godly living. He wrote that Christ followers have been raised from the dead with Christ already. How can that be? If we spend our lives seeking and acquiring things and miss out on the opportunity to grow in faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ, then we are already dead – spiritually dead, and may have lost out on the opportunity to live forever with God.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

I apologize again for the title of the sermon being rather rude, "Don't Be a Fool!" I would prefer to reinforce positive behaviors, so let's try this. Be wise about all things, but especially be wise about things that are spiritual and eternal. I've been at the bedside of many a dying person, and no one ever said, "I wish I would have spent more time at work." Or "I wish my investments would have paid off better." At the end the only thing that matters is your relationship with God revealed in Jesus Christ.

I nor anyone else can give that to you. You have to work on it yourselves. But while all else may be vanity of vanities, the time you put into your relationship with God revealed in Jesus Christ today will pay off for eternity.

Prayer

Amen