

## Sermon 08-08-10 "Rich Toward God" Proper 14C

If someone dares to say to you "get a life!"—I'll tell you this morning how to find it.

If you missed church last Sunday I'm sorry, because I think Cindy said some things that it would have been good for you to hear—or for that matter, for any of us to hear. She preached on the text from Luke 12:15, just a few verses back from our Gospel passage this morning, "(Jesus said) *Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions*"

That, my friends, is one of the most contemporary verses in the bible. Only in my lifetime would those verses deal so directly with the circumstances of most of us here this morning. I was born a few months just before the Great Depression hit this country in 1929. Down through history before that, in different ways, there was a sharp divide between being rich in the world's goods and poor. After 1929 and the Great Depression it was not until about twenty years later, say about 1950, did average Americans have a growing abundance of goods available, with all kinds of choices of what to buy and, now, the discretionary money to buy them. People began to read about this phenomenon in books like John Galbreath's "Age of Affluence" and other titles like "Surfeit of Riches" and later, "The Millionaire Next Door."

This phenomenon has been going on for sixty years now, with some ups and down, unparalleled in all history. Never

before have so much goods and money been available to so many. "Haves and "Have-nots" were always taken for granted before as levels of society, but now since after World War II the playing field for goods and choices has been leveled off to a degree never known before. You can thank VISA and the consumer credit cards and the mortgage bundlers for much of that. That's why I say that these verses about abundance are the most contemporary and relevant passages in scripture.

You may ask, how are they relevant to me? You may not like thinking about it, and much of the reason we're uncomfortable accepting the relevance of those passages to life for many people today, can be summed up in a simple word, "Greed." Most of us can't accept being labeled as "Greedy" so let's try a simple phrase: "we always want More". We buy more shoes because they're on sale and we keep the old ones; we go to an estate sale to buy some more jewelry and keep using what we had; in my case I go to a church sale to buy some more books, or another bookshelf.

For many of us it's hard to let go of all the stuff that money can buy because that "stuff" seems to give the security and comfort we want and think we need. In the cathedral I served for many years in Buffalo I remember Ruth Estill. She lived modestly, but she did expect the dean to bring her Christmas communion at home since she could not get to church. When I entered into that ritual in 1968 she would greet me from her rocking chair near the front door which opened directly into her living room. Then I watched what

happened as the years went by. Some 20 years later, after children and grandchildren had expressed their affection with birthday and Christmas gifts every year, her favorite rocking chair had gradually through the years been moved back, and now she would greet me from the far end of the living room, because she never got rid of anything.

Why is it that people build bigger houses with bigger mortgages? George Carlin, sort of a Will Rogers for our times wrote “sometimes you’ve got to move—to get a bigger house. Why? Because there’s not room for your stuff anymore. When you leave your house you’ve got to lock it up. That’s what your house is—a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get more stuff”

A life built around acquiring more stuff can lead away from just security and comfort to anxiety about having enough. I heard of a man who won a small lottery one month. Then surprisingly in the next two months two relatives died and left him \$40,000 one month and then \$60,000 the next month. Those experiences changed his life, but not for the better. A friend who knew about those windfalls happened to meet him one day and found him as glum as he could be. “How come you look so glum? the friend asked. The man’s answer? “For months now, there’s nothing!” MORE is not the answer to a better life.

I’ve told you the story of Nasrudin before. He was out in the street searching around because he had lost his keys. “Why are you looking in the street for your keys?” a friend asked. “Because that’s where the light is!” answered Nasrudin. Like

Nasrudin you may have been worrying because you have been looking for a better life in the wrong places. That's what the end of the Gospel passage this morning is all about—be watchful lest you become like the Rich Fool building a bigger barn. Be watchful for the right place to be looking as you try to find a life that is “Rich toward God.”

To be rich toward God refers to the life-long spiritual pilgrimage toward what I call “accepting our acceptance”—really accepting, living into the biblical truth that God has shown his unconditionally generous love for us, and that “while we were yet sinners,” he sent his only Son to live and die for us. So then, Jesus says, “do not be anxious about your life.” **If you know God accepts you, you don't have to gain acceptance by having more “things” or “stuff” or by achieving the status that money or possessions confer.**

It takes most of us many years of living to discover that truth—and some of us never do—but let me suggest a way to discover how to be “Rich Toward God”—figuring out what we value in life.

Years ago someone suggested to me that if I wanted to know what was important to me I should first look at my checkbook and my calendar. (It really helps—you might want to do the same thing after you get home from church this morning) Isn't it true that all we have in life is our time, our abilities, and our money? Where are those resources going? I would almost guarantee that this exercise of checking your checkbook and credit card statement and your

calendar, can change your life, if you're ready for it. Jesus puts it this way: **"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."** **Richness toward God can be found if we take a wider look at where we give our time, our money—and our hearts—and refocus and reinvest them in what truly matters!**

My friends, we're all being told that we should watch out about "identity theft" these days. I would like to invite you this morning to think more about "identity recognition." Wouldn't you agree with me that Jesus, with his words this morning and so much of his teaching, has gone straight to the heart of what it is to "get a life"—a life WORTH eternalizing?

Amen