

Psalm 107:1-9, 43

Hosea 11:1-11

Colossians 3:1-11

Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" And 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." Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then 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. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But 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?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

I have a confession to make. Sometimes I write sermon titles before I have any idea what my focus will be on the sermon. If I could redo the Bulletin, my sermon title for today would be "Distractions," because when I read an article by David J. Schlafer I really appreciated his statements, "The issue [in this text] is not so much investments and dividends - as it is *distractions*." He went on to say "The issue is *careful discernment regarding various dimensions of value*."

"*Careful discernment regarding various dimensions of value*." Yes, the basic warning of Jesus here is about monetary greed, and we are all called to focus on riches toward God - but there are so many fine aspects of Greed and confusions about God's riches, and then, when we throw in our apparently natural human behavior and mass cultural expectations, the various layers of what is worthy to live for can become twisted and confused and we need to take time to sort them all out. What we need to do is carefully look at, contemplate, study, examine our values - over long periods of time. All things have some value - it is the circle of life! Even mosquitoes are important!

Our callings as children of God is find out what the deeper meanings are of the various aspects of our lives and then to fine tune our lives so that we are better able to fill them with the joy and confidence and love of God. We need to ask ourselves everyday - what is it that distracts us from faith and trust in God?

This morning on NPR's "Speaking of Faith", I heard most of Krista Tippet's interview with Rachel Naomi Remen, physician and best-selling author - and life long sufferer of Crohn's disease. At one point in her life story she was led into becoming a therapist for people who suffer. She was working with predominately people who were "on the edge of life." She said, "the view from the edge of life is so much clearer than the view that most of us have. That what seems to be important is much more simple and accessible for everybody - which is - who you've touched on your way through life, who's touched you? What you're leaving behind you in the hearts and minds of other people is far more important than any wealth you may have accumulated."

Krista then asks her why this simple truth, which we *all* have heard and know on some level - why is so difficult to take seriously before we get to that edge of life, and Rachel Naomi Remen said, "I think it is because we get so distracted - by stories other people have told us about ourselves - that we aren't enough - that we will be happy if we have material goods - that material goods will keep us safe. None of these stories are true - what is true is all we have is each other."

So - let's look again at the text. A man asks Jesus to use his power for his cause against a brother. Jesus immediately denied he had this authority and called him on it. But the question remains, why would someone come to a rabbinic teacher to arbitrate a legal matter?

For the reason that money and property represent a security and independence that most humans crave. From the moment babies start walking on their own, it seems that we want to have free reign all over our own domains. Humans have to be shown by example and trained to share their toys, to be polite and thoughtful, to respect other people, because our tendencies toward selfishness can hurt those around us and those tendencies seem to ignore our greater more concealed need - to love and be loved.

There is nothing sadder than someone who desperately wants to be loved but their out-of-control, spoiled, self centeredness makes it very hard to satisfy the deeper more desperate need, and it becomes harder to break that cycle. So this man asks Jesus to deal with this personal family financial matter because by this point, money was a spiritual matter to him. Money became his obsession - the focus of much of his attentions. Just as Jesus told Martha, when she complained that Mary wasn't doing her fair share of the housework, Jesus said that she was "distracted by many things," Jesus is telling this man that he isn't focusing on the right issue. He is distracted.

So Jesus tells him this story of a rich man, but first comes right out and clearly states what it is all about. He says, "Be on your guard against *all kinds* of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." "All kinds of greed" – we have so many examples everyday on obvious and more subtle kinds of greed. Greed is not just for money – but hoarding of all kinds. It is a selfish and excessive desire for more of something than is needed, and would all be surprised how little we actually need in our lives. We all have so much excess than what we need.

In his parable, Jesus quotes the rich man as using the personal pronoun 11 times. He is enormously self-centered. It is all *his* land *his* riches – but let us not forget this man was not described as a rich farmer – he is described as a rich man – he is a landowner but most likely he never once stepped foot on his land to care for these crops himself – but yet, it is all his.

St. Augustine comments that the farmer was "planning to fill his soul with excessive and unnecessary feasting and was proudly disregarding all those empty bellies of the poor. He did not realize that the bellies of the poor were much safer storerooms than his barns."

Now, Jesus had nothing against riches in and of themselves. He was known for feasting and drinking wine, and when someone tried to embarrass the woman who poured an alabaster of rich oils on his head he defended her. So it isn't the wealth that has him concerned – it is the concern to acquire wealth that he preaches against.

Arland J. Hultgren comments that the parable "provides an example of what one ought not to be like. The person *whose identity* is tied up with his or her possessions, status, and/or achievements — and is driven by acquiring them — can so easily end up unaware of the call of God and the need of the neighbor."

Jesus knows of a life where contentment is just a prayer away, where the feeling of being loved and having joy in our hearts is always there, as well as the strength one needs to stand up to forces of fear and darkness. The power of Love is found in the giving to other people. The focus on self-sacrifice helps guard us from our tendencies to hoard and be afraid. So in this sense, maybe the sermon title as found in the bulletin wasn't so far off – we need to look at what distracts us from the realization that all we need is love.

The man who initially asked the question of Jesus seemed to be more focused on the wealth than on the relationship with the brother – asking a Rabbi to come and shame the brother into giving him his "due". The rich man seemed to be thinking about future personal pleasures – even though he was already rich – rather than living each second of his life as though it could be his last. And if we live our lives as if we could die any second – how would that change our interactions with our fellow universe? If love of humanity and the rest of God's creation was the goal of our existence – how would we live our lives differently?

Lets us look at our Epistle for a moment on guidance on how to refocus our attentions – how to avoid being distracted. We heard and read earlier, "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator."

We hear the theme of death again – but it is focusing on death while one is still alive – killing off all those tendencies which block the light of love and goodness from streaming into our souls. And greed is mentioned as being idolatry – the worship of a physical object as a god or immoderate attachment or devotion to something. We can see here that the desire for wealth and fame are based in greed a sort of *worship of self*. And we are called to focus our lives on something higher – someone higher. Focusing on the person and Godhood of Jesus helps us to see the idols for what they are – greedy, selfish, destructive tools.

We are called in our lives to love and be loved. We are capable compassionate souls and we can have truly blessed lives even when we have little money. The greatest lie that our culture today brings is that money is somehow a determining factor on the value of a human being. The poor woman who gave her sacrifice of a small coin is of greater value than the riches of people giving only a small offering in comparison. Our daily sacrifices for love, our attempts to care for others and yes, our financial donations are what makes our lives worth living. Our personal value is measured by how much we are loved.

So since my title is a reference to a Beatles song – I'll close with this:  
"And, in the end, the love you take/ Is equal to the love you make."