

“Give It Away”
Text: Luke 12:13-21

8/1/2010

How many of you have a basement that is just packed full of things that you never use? Oh, that’s right, there aren’t many basements here in Greenfield, so let me ask that another way: how many of you have an attic, or a closet packed full of things you haven’t seen or used in you don’t know how long? What would you say if I told you that you should go home after today’s service and just give it all away? You already have everything you’ll ever need in Christ, so you *can* give away all that other stuff without missing a thing. Give it away, folks. That’s what Jesus says in today’s Gospel.

As we listen to Him say that, we return to today’s Gospel, where we see Jesus continuing on the journey He’s been making these past several weeks in the Gospel of Luke – the journey to Jerusalem and the cross. This week we see Him being followed by a rather large crowd, as Luke writes a few verses before those of today’s Gospel that:

“...so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another...”(12:1)

In today’s Gospel Luke goes on to say that:

“Someone in the crowd said to (Jesus): ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.’”(v.13)

This seems to have been a situation where a younger brother felt as though he had been dealt with *unfairly* in the dividing up of a family’s estate, with the brother requesting that Jesus step in and play the role of arbitrator, making things right. That would be a matter for a lawyer to settle, of course, and since Jesus was not a lawyer He refused to get involved, saying:

“Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?”(v.14)

Jesus then went on to say to the crowd:

“Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”(v.15)

Jesus told a parable to illustrate His point, about a rich man whose land produced for him in abundance. When the man found himself in the problematic but also enviable situation of not having enough space to store his crops, he decided to tear down his barns and replace them with larger ones, resolving to store up his wealth and take life easy – as he says in Jesus’ parable:

“I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. I will...take (my) ease, eat, drink, and be merry.”(v.19)

Of course, Jesus' parable ends with a twist of fate for the man, when God comes on the scene and says to him:

“You fool! (never a good thing in the Bible, by the way: to be called a fool, especially by God) This very night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”(v. 20)

Jesus then drives home His point by saying:

“So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”
(v. 21)

What Jesus is saying is that we can't take into the next life the things of this life. When this life is over God will want to know how we used the things of this life. What will we tell Him? What will we have to show on the Day of Judgment for how we lived this life and used the things given us here? Jesus would have us know that none of it will do us any good then. It would be a lot better to just use the things of this life for the good of others; it'd be better to give it away.

We see that when we try and put ourselves in the place of those who first heard this parable. Their culture was so different from ours. Especially here in America, the idea of poverty is foreign to many of us, while in Jesus' day it was a fact of most people's everyday lives. Today we have more than enough stuff to go around; in Jesus' day, there wasn't nearly enough, and many people lived in abject poverty, with little or no hope of ever getting out of it. All of that would've made Jesus' parable sound a 'bit different to the ears of those who first heard it than it does to ours.

When Jesus speaks of this man as storing his crops to take his ease by eating, drinking, and being merry, he's saying to His listeners that this guy was a real jerk; he was selfish and totally absorbed with himself. In fact, take note of all the uses of the word “my” in the parable, again:

“I will tear down *my* barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all *my* grain and *my* goods....”(v.19)

It's sickening. You'd a thought the man would've given *some* consideration for the poor around him – which again, in Jesus' day would've been easy to find, because they'd have been all around him!

One of the great “fathers” of the Church: St. Ambrose, picked up on that when he said that the man in this parable didn't need to tear down his barns and build larger ones, for he had room for storage ‘in the mouths of the needy.’ The people of Jesus' day would've instantly understood that whatever judgment this guy got from God was well deserved. His wealth didn't

do him any good because he didn't do any good with it. The people of Jesus' day would've understood that the man would've been better off to just give it away. The same goes for us, as Jesus says to us today that:

“...one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”(v.15)

It's a freeing thing to grasp the truth of those words.

I cannot begin to tell you how many times I've been in a position, as a pastor, of having people ask me for things – be it money, or food, or gas for their car. People are always asking me for help. Sometimes I don't give it – usually when they just come out and ask for money, because sometimes it seems clear that they're going to go out and waste it on something that's not good for them (like liquor). I don't like wasting what God has given me; on the contrary, I want to be a good steward of those things. But here's the thing: we want to be careful that we don't use that as an excuse to not give to those in need. That's probably why there have been times when I have given away money to people. At the end of the day it just seemed wrong not to be generous with others when God has been so generous with me.

Of course, I don't want to throw away what God has given me (good stewardship and all that), and so I do try to be somewhat selective. But then again, I'm NOT *throwing* anything away; I'm *giving* it away, to someone in need. They'll never repay it (and by the way, they always say they will, but they never do). And how many times haven't I been taken for a fool, having given things to people who only went out and wasted it? But so what? Can I honestly stand here and say that my life has been any worse or less blessed because of it? Would hanging on to a few more dollars, or whatever it might be, make my life more full? I say St. Ambrose had it right: better to find a storage place for things in the mouths of the poor. Better to just give it away.

I encourage you to do that, folks. And I'm NOT saying you should go out and give away all your money. I am saying that there are all kinds of ways to give of what you have to help others...(list some here)...When you give to others, you get far more back than you ever give away, not the least of which is the freedom of not having to worry about holding on to what you have.

And with that we arrive at our conclusion. But as we do, it occurs to me that we haven't yet heard any Gospel in this sermon. The reason is that it's kinda tough to find it in today's Gospel lesson (in fact, I don't actually think it's there, anywhere). But we can find it later on in this 12th chapter of Luke's Gospel, if we read on into the verses following those of today's reading – the verses of *next week's Gospel* (which is O.K., since I won't be with you next week). When we do that, we find these words:

“Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried.
For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows

that you need them. Instead, seek His Kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."(vs. 31-32)

My dear friends in Christ, you don't need to hold on to any of the things of this life, because you already have a God Whose pleasure it is to give you His Kingdom. As we said last week, He has pledged even the life of His one and only Son to provide for you all your needs. With that assurance – the assurance of the blood of the Son of God – what do you have to worry about? What do you need to hold onto? What are you afraid of losing? You can't lose a thing, not anything that matters, because in Christ Jesus you have it all, and nothing can take Him away from you. Don't waste your life trying to hang on to things that you can't take with you, things that run the risk of dragging you away from God in the End. Give those things away, folks. It's the pathway to a freer, fuller, and yes, richer life. Give it away –

– In Jesus' ✠ Name,
Amen!