

Pentecost 11 Proper 13 Year C
Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14, 2:18-23 Psalm 49:1-11
Colossians 3:1-11 Luke 12:13-21

Security; God vs. Material Wealth

We are living in a material world and I am a material girl. 🎵🎵

In a 1986 interview with “Company” magazine regarding this song, singer Madonna said, “you are attracted to men who have material things because that’s what pays the rent and buys you furs. That’s security that lasts longer than emotion.”

Did your jaw just drop? Did you mentally say: “Really?” Consider this:

It’s impossible to watch regular TV and not be bombarded with ads offering you security for: your family, your home, your car, your old age, your bath....you name it, there’s a security option for you—for a price of course. Those of us on the younger end of the boomer generation don’t know any other world. We grew up believing the security offered in these ads is not a luxury—it’s a necessity! Strive for financial riches and then store up those riches—that’s security!

When my siblings and I were growing up, our mother could not provide financially for us so we became members of the welfare class. Consequently we learned to value the material things we did not have.

When my sister was 17 she was accidentally shot in the chest while “hanging out” with friends in a local convenience store. A couple of years later she received a settlement check. She then proceeded to spend the entire amount on a car, furniture, and various other items. When a delivery truck arrived with some of the furniture, she exclaimed, “Now I am truly happy!” And I was truly jealous.

Well, 40 years later, that life and all those things are gone. For a great part of that 40 years I lived that life Madonna talks about; looking for that material security. Yet, even when I thought I found it I was not satisfied. I did not feel secure—or happy.

Jesus spoke often about the pitfall in striving for riches. So isn’t this parable in our reading today just another story Jesus told to instill in his hearers the evilness and greed that can be a result of material wealth? In this story Jesus is again surrounded by a mixed crowd; his disciples, some inquirers, those looking for a “good show”, and some who want to discredit him. Someone shouts “hey, tell my brother to give me my inheritance!” My first thought is: why? Is the man greedy? Or is he worried about his ability to be secure? Jesus gives his answer to **everyone** through a parable.

I think he used this parable because he knew how hard life was for the majority of people living under Roman rule—and he knew it was unlikely that their financial lot was going to get much better. So Jesus gave them hope about their future; he was talking to them about security—not financial security—real security. Jesus had been preaching and teaching that true security will only come by building a strong relationship with God. Before he gives the parable he puts a modern spin on the scripture from the Law of Moses when he says: "...one's life does not consist of the abundance of possessions...when you are gone, whose will they be?" He does not say there is anything wrong with the wealth. It is the attitude of the rich man that is the problem. The rich man in the story apparently believed that having fine foods, fine wine, expensive clothes, and a beautiful home would last him a long time and make him happy—that partying and relaxing was "where it was at." But, he never got to enjoy it—and he never got to see anyone else enjoy it either. And just why did he need to build a bigger storage? To secure all that wealth—and part of that security meant keeping out the thieves—a worry. He had to worry. I'm only guessing, but I imagine had he lived, he would have found the thrill of having was more like a big headache. It takes a lot of time and energy and money to take care of wealth and keep it safe and secure.

Jesus wanted everyone to understand that it is in the kingdom of God that security is assured—not in the money and material things one can store up; what is to be stored up is love for God and therefore people.

After 40 years of worrying about having nice things, and plenty of money to take care of all my needs, it came to me while sitting right here in St. Peter's: This, is security. I figured out the legacy of Jesus and the apostles. Our relationship with God is tied up in our relationship with one another. When I stopped worrying and searching, suddenly, I had enough. I realized that WE are God's kingdom and as such God's love and our love for God, moves us to love one another. While the natural rhythm and instincts of nature provide for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, God's love moves us to provide for one another—to share our bounty and to spread that love until all know the security that comes from filling oneself with the grace of God.