

## Proper 21 September 29,2013-Year C

I would like to start off this morning with a question: Who wants to be rich? I can think of 2 reasons I want to be rich: 1<sup>st</sup>: I would not want to be poor and be at the mercy of some guy dressed in fine purple who wouldn't share; and, 2<sup>nd</sup>: I would want to share with a guy named Lazarus because I wouldn't want to be looking up at him later from a place of agony.

But, just what does it mean to be rich? Some years ago I was stopped behind a vehicle displaying a bumper sticker which read "Whoever dies with the most toys wins!" I remember scratching my head thinking, wins what? A headstone with the epitaph: "Here lies so and so the guy who died with the most toys." And, the need to build a bigger barn, to hold all those toys, like the guy in the gospel story a few weeks ago. Now don't get me wrong. I'm not saying, nor do I think Jesus or Paul were, that there's anything wrong, necessarily, with being rich-remember, Abraham was wealthy, but obedient to God-it's the attitude that counts. It's how we use the gifts of God for the good of God's Kingdom that's important.

Today's readings are among the many examples in scripture which warn against a pre-occupation with wealth. The law required God's people to share with the needy; but, the conventional Jewish thought was that wealth was indicative of God's blessing, while being poor somehow suggested ungodliness. In the Gospel, according to Luke, Jesus uses yet another parable to challenge the Pharisees, who not only misinterpret the law of Moses but don't recognize the key to the Kingdom-God's son-standing in their midst.

Sometimes I wonder if we're so different from the Pharisees? I like to think so; but, we seem to be living in a world whose focus is on the accumulation of wealth masquerading as prosperity. A world that causes us to worry about whether we'll have enough tomorrow. What if the market changes; or, what if there's a crisis and we run out of \$? Will there ever be enough \$?

Perhaps one reason we continue to be concerned that we don't have enough or that we might run out is somehow related to our tendency to focus too much on "Self" and not enough on poor Lazarus. My belief is that God blesses us with our bounty-not to hoard and worry over-whether it will still be ours tomorrow. No! God shares it with us with the understanding we'll share it with Lazarus-with those in need-with those who have not.

My guess is that a world of peace through justice will never be realized until we get this through our heads. This will only happen when we stop listening and adhering to the foolish wisdom of the world and start listening to the true wisdom of Jesus.

While I'm confident Jesus would expect us to invest our resources wisely in order to get the best return-that's just making the most out of what we've been given, increasing the bounty to share with each other and God's Kingdom- the problem lies in our fear of running out-the mindset that "I worked hard for it! I earned it! It's mine!"

To that extent, we are correct, we did work hard for it and, likewise, we would expect those to whom we share to work hard in appreciation of God's bounty, too. In other words, I'm not promoting nor do I think did Jesus or Paul, sharing with "Freeloaders." We all need to pull our own weight.

I was blessed with parents most kids only dream of. There's no doubt they currently enjoy the fruits of God's heavenly mansion. As a boy I emulated their value system which reflected a post-depression way of thinking. You know, the idea that you were to work hard, make as much \$ as possible and stand on your own 2 feet. You were to be in charge of your own destiny and figured others were to do the same. Fortunately, for me, a tendency toward responsibility was the inevitable result.

But, despite their no-nonsense value system, I frequently witnessed my parents engaging in a "Christ-like" giving behavior towards the less fortunate. Growing up, we had a large family living behind us, who my parents would occasionally loan \$ to get them over the hump in between paychecks. So, while my parents taught me a lot about being responsible-more than that they taught me to love. As a result, my focus has evolved from a preoccupation and concern over Jim's destiny to a growing interest in the transformative potential and destiny of All.

So, I ask you again, what does it mean to be rich? I'm convinced it does not mean dying with the most "stuff;" unless, that "stuff" is the spirit of truth and wisdom which comes through a life in Christ. A life where the pursuit of our labors is not just about an accumulation of wealth beyond providing for self and family, but one in which we discover that it truly is better to give than to receive. Through giving, we become liberated from need and worry over being in control of stuff, and allow God to be in control. And, we are liberated from the pursuit of labor for self alone-a pursuit which ultimately leads to a feeling of emptiness and inevitably death. Instead we discover a life rich in spirit, rich in justice, rich in peace-rich in Christ!

In the gospel according to Mark, before feeding the 4 thousand, Jesus asked his disciples, "How many loaves to you have?" They said 7; and, God fed them all with baskets left over.

So, then, brothers and sisters, whenever we are presented with someone in need, we can share with them liberally out of the bounty with which God has blessed us, absent of worry, because we know God makes sure there's enough left over.

The lyrics of their 1971 song "Nothing is the Same" by Grand Funk Railroad contain the verse: "No matter how hard you push on the door, it won't open without the key." The Pharisees had the key to the door of the Kingdom, but they didn't use it. Jesus is the key, and He has granted us access to the Kingdom through Him. We need only open our hearts to His spirit and we become truly rich.

Oh Yes! We have enough! We always have! The Kingdom of God is here. The Kingdom of God is in us and The Kingdom of God is ours to share! Amen!