

Sermon for August 5, 2007: Being Rich Toward God – Communion Sunday

Hosea 11: 1-11

Luke 12: 13-21

Whenever I read this passage from Luke, I am reminded of my Aunt Elsie, and the furor that has occurred in my extended family over inheritances. There have been two disputes about inheritances in which my Aunt Elsie played a key role. And, I must admit, my mother and other aunts and uncles would have been in the position of the man going to Jesus and asking for justice. But what is justice? In part, especially in issues of inheritance, justice is related to need. None of my relatives NEEDED the inheritances under question. In both cases, the strong preferences for one party was more about feelings and emotions than true financial need. That doesn't mean that seemingly inequitable inheritances aren't hurtful – they can be. But to the extent that our complaints are related to greed, well, greed is a hard thing to justify.

Jesus is talking about greed and what we put our trust in, in the parable He tells in response to the man's request to deal with the inheritance issue. The rich fool in question is all about himself – what should I do? These are MY crops. These are MY barns. This is MY grain and MY goods. The abundant yield is for HIS use, for many years. Never do we see gratitude toward God. Never do we see an awareness of his neighbors and relatives. Never do we see any indication of sharing or generosity or concern for those who do not have so many possessions. He is all about taking care of HIMSELF, for many years. And yet God reminds him that none of us are made safe by our possessions. All of us will die – and some of us will die sooner rather than later. The amount of things we have, the material goods that we surround ourselves with, will not add a single day to our lives. Therefore, Jesus tells us, we are to be RICH TOWARD GOD.

What makes us rich toward God? What is Jesus teaching us here? If the rich fool is what we are NOT supposed to do, what ARE we supposed to do? Paul gets us started with the idea of richness in his letter to the Colossians that we used this morning for the teaching of the law. He tells us to get rid of anger, wrath, malice, slander and abusive language. But that isn't enough – that only tells us what we aren't supposed to do. So what is the opposite of these behaviors that Jesus and Paul describe? We are rich toward God when we act RICH: when we REJOICE, when we INCLUDE others, when we act in CHARITY, and when we are HUMBLE.

We are rich toward God when we REJOICE, when we praise God in all times and in all places. Praise helps us to remember that we are not really the source of all good things – God is. We are God's beloved children – and when He calls us we know we can come to Him.

We are rich toward God when we INCLUDE others. The idea of remembering ALL of God's children, of caring for those who are worse off than we are, is a major theme of the Old Testament. Jesus talked a lot about caring for the lost, the lonely, the young, the old, the marginalized. When we welcome those whom the world might exclude, when we look at others and see the Image of God in them, no matter how different we may be from one another on a superficial level, we show God's love in the world in this time and place.

We are rich toward God when we act in CHARITY toward others. We are expected to share our time, our talent and our treasure with one another for the betterment

of this lost and broken world that God loves so much. When we work to help others meet their basic needs, we are being rich toward God. Sometimes we have more time, and sometimes we have more money. Both things matter – the talents that we all have which help us to build up the body of Christ take time, and sometimes take money too. Charity means more than just time, talent and treasure, though – it also extends into the positive side of what Paul was talking about. Charity implies forgiveness, kindness, gentleness, responsibility, honesty, integrity, openness. When we act in charitable ways toward one another, we are rich toward God.

We are rich toward God when we are HUMBLE. God has gifted us all with abilities, including the ability to make some sort of contribution to society. Society may value some contributions more than others – some contributions may be more glamorous than others, but all of us matter. All of us need to contribute to the building up of the Body of Christ – and none of us can build up the Body by ourselves. The success that we have isn't because we are so great – it's because GOD is so great. The things we have, the accomplishments we achieve, are due in large part to the gifts that God has given to us. We are to use those gifts – but when we are “successful” that doesn't mean that we achieved “success” on our own. All that we have is a gift from God – all of it.

God has blessed us with so much. We live in this time and in this place. We have abundant water, electricity, food, shelter, safety. Most of us are reasonably healthy. We may not all be wealthy, but compared to the rest of the world, we are. Most of us have reliable transportation, friends, support systems, people who care about us. We don't have to worry about car bombs or famines or machine guns.

But those are only material things. We also have this incredible blessing from God: we are His beloved children. We have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. We have been called by name – we are His. As we come together to celebrate communion, to celebrate that wondrous love that sent the Son of God into the world to redeem us and save us, let us act rich toward God: REJOICING, INCLUDING, acting with CHARITY, and staying grounded by staying HUMBLE, as we spread the good news of salvation to all who will hear, until the Lord comes again. Even so, come soon, Lord Jesus.

Hosea 11: 1-11

When Israel was a child, I loved Him, and out of Egypt I called My son. The more I called them, the more they went from Me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in My arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them. They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to Me. The sword rages in their cities, it consumes their oracle-priests, and devours because of their schemes. My people are bent on turning away from Me. To the Most High they call, but He does not raise them up at all.

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within Me; My compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute My fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. They shall go after the LORD, who roars like a lion; when He roars, His children shall come trembling from the west. They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says the LORD.

Colossians 3: 1-11

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). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. 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. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

Luke 12: 13-21

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” But Jesus 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.”