

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost /August 4, 2019
Luke 12:11-21/Worth More than Gold
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“...for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

My introduction to Russian literature was a novel, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, I read in junior high by Nobel Prize winning novelist, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. He moved to the Northeast part of the US after being exiled from the CCCP in the 1980’s and later he observed, “On the way from the Renaissance to our days we have enriched our experience, but we have lost the concept of a Supreme Complete Entity which used to restrain our passions and our irresponsibility. We have placed too much hope in political and social reforms, only to find out that we were being deprived of our most precious possession: our spiritual life. In the East, it is destroyed by the dealings and machinations of the ruling party. In the West, commercial interests tend to suffocate it.”

Solzhenitsyn, at least in terms of his assessment of the West, was only echoing a Scriptural principle, namely you can’t serve two masters. Consumerism and the pursuit of plenty tend to suffocate our spiritual life, not because they are inherently evil, but, because our old nature, which we carry with us even though we are in Christ, is concerned only with the things of this world.

In the Gospel reading before us this morning, Jesus told a parable about priorities and our tendency to forsake the eternal gifts of God for the sake of temporal things. A man’s land, He said, “produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear 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, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

It is a great parable! Remember a parable is an earthly narrative which reveal heavenly truths. It sorts out for us some conflicts we have between wealth and godliness. Wealth and the things we buy with wealth are amoral, that is, in and of themselves, they have no moral value, good or bad. There is nothing inherently wrong with a person being wealthy. Nor is there anything wrong with building barns to store the fruit wealth can produce. There isn't even anything wrong with his relaxing, eating, drinking and being merry. None of these things are, in and of themselves, ungodly.

The problem with the rich man in the parable is, while he was rich in material possessions, he was not rich toward, really the word is closer to in, God. More to the point, God wasn't even a part of his life! He was content with the wealth he amassed, but his soul was deprived, dead in God. While he thought he had many years to relax and enjoy his great wealth, he would die that very night and leave all the wealth behind. Worse yet, in death, he would stand before God, the God he never knew, in judgment.

You and I are constantly being tempted to value our stuff, or, someone else's over the well-being of our neighbor, and, even over our relationship with God. If we have a lot of stuff, we want to guard it and protect it. If we don't have much stuff and other people do, we covet what they have, and we find all sorts of injustice in the inequity; and heaven forbid anyone should get in the way of our acquiring more stuff.

The truth is, the emptiness we try to fill with the acquisition of stuff can only be filled with Christ, who puts meaning into life, a meaning that transcends the few years we have here on earth and in this time. St. Augustine, the 4th century church father, was correct when he wrote, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in the Lord.”

Remember, [Matt 11:28-30] “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” The One who was rich, for our sake, [2 Cor 8:9] “...became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.” Jesus left His stately hall, His glory at the side of His Father, to take on your restlessness, your discontent, your searching, your longing, your emptiness. He bore on His body your sin, the root cause of your alienation from Him. He took away all the reasons you could find to hide from Him, to find satisfaction in the things of this world.

Now, He sets before you things of eternal significance. Listen to the sound of my voice. While only a fellow sinner, rejoicing in the grace and forgiveness of Christ, I am proclaiming to you God’s Word, a Word that transcends the ages, a Word that steeled the souls of men and women even as they suffered sword and fire, a Word that comforts troubled hearts and gives hope where there was only despair.

Look around you. These are your brothers and sisters and Christ, people put here by God to walk this lonely road with you to the glory of heaven. They are your mutual consolation, the ones who have suffered what you suffer, that they might be a blessing in your life.

The things that matter most in this life aren’t the things you can buy; they are things money can’t buy. Remember God purchased and won

you for eternity, my friends, “not with gold or silver, but with the precious blood of His dear Son.”

Think about the words from hymn 730 “What Is the World to Me”:

“What is the world to me!
My Jesus is my treasure,
My life, my health, my wealth,
My friend, my love, my pleasure,
My joy, my crown, my all,
My bliss eternally.
Once more, then, I declare;
What is the world to me!”

May these words come to your mind when tempted to think about stuff. Remember, it is Christ Alone that saves you. He looks at you and thinks you are much more worthy than all the gold that exist. I pray you always know and cherish the gift of Christ’s sacrifice for you and the Holy Spirit which brings the peace of God that passes all human understanding to keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting in the new Heavens and new Earth.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be and abide with you all.