

Sunday, August 4th, 2019
Hosea 11:1-11; Ps 107:1-9, 43;
Col 3:1-11; Lu 12:13-21

Going through all my belongings as I am downsizing: Wow! I have too much stuff! When I moved to Seattle to go to college, everything I owned fit in a Volkswagen Bug. This June I was in the ABQ Airport – returning to Oregon from the NM Annual Conference. Once again, I saw Americans toting and pulling huge suitcases filled with all those things we take along – because we think we cannot find them where we are going. It seems to me we are buried in stuff.

Do you ever watch the program “American Pickers” on the History Channel? These two guys travel around to find folks who have sheds, barns, trailers and fields piled with old, rusty things: cars, carnival rides, equestrian tack, household goods, huge signs, juke boxes...on and on and on. We as a nation seem to have plenty of things – and we seem to hold onto them as long as we can. Do you think this stuff is doing us any good?

Jesus has a word for each one of us this morning: *“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” (Luke 12:15)* Nowhere does the Bible say it’s wrong to have money or the things that money can buy. Where we lose our way is when money becomes the driving purpose of our lives. (Bill Crowder, *Our Daily Bread*) Eugene Peterson paraphrases the passage in Luke like this: *“Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot.” (v 15)*

One time I offered a children’s moment on a Sunday morning. I wanted the children to understand a little about tithing. So, I had some sandwich bags with ten pennies in them. I shared the appropriate Scriptures with the kids; then I passed a little basket and each child placed a penny in the basket. They quickly saw that there were still nine pennies in their bag. One little guy, a third grader with beautiful red hair and freckles piped up and said, “That’s real easy with pennies, but what about with thousands of dollars?” The question of generosity or even obedience to God becomes more difficult the larger the amount we have. Jesus, on this same

journey to Jerusalem, said later on: *How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. (Lu 18:24-25)*

There is a great story about a young woman named Sabrina. It was made into a movie in the 50s, and starred Audrey Hepburn and Humphrey Bogart. It was remade in the 90s with Julia Ormond and Harrison Ford. At one point in the story, there is a scene with the older and younger brothers. They are from a wealthy family, the Larrabees, whose fortune has increased under the older son's management over the years. The younger son is a playboy and lives an idle life of privilege. The older son has been diligent and shrewd in managing the family business. Linus, the elder, says to David the younger, "My life makes your life possible." David replies, "I resent that!" Linus snaps back, "So do I!" Linus believes that he is the one providing for his brother, who takes no interest in the family business – David does not even keep hours at the office. Linus, on the other hand, is a workaholic and has become

power-mad in his years of unlimited control of the family fortune. Linus sees himself as the source of power – and he believes that the wealth in his control makes things happen. His idolatry is complete – he is sold out to the “almighty dollar.”

It seems to me that we in our American culture see ourselves as the makers of wealth. We have traded the golden age of Greece for the greasy age of gold. We congratulate ourselves on our success. We tend to believe that all the virtue, talent and imagination originate in us, not in our Creator and not in our Savior. Listen again as what Jesus tells the parable of the very successful farmer: *"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down **my** barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all **my** grain and **my** goods.'" (Lu 12:18)* The great temptation when profits are high is to hold onto all that has come our way. The human heart is wayward and self-absorbed. Greed, Jesus warns this young man who asks for a judgment on his older brother – greed separates you from life.

You say, “Surely not, preacher!” Greed isn’t that bad. “I’m sure Jesus loves me just the way I am!” The tender passage from the prophet Hosea shows clearly that God loves his children exactly like a daddy. He taught Ephraim to walk and took him up in his arms like any loving parent. But, look carefully at the path that Israel must take when they return to the living God, who has loved them with everlasting love. Hosea prophesies that they will first go into exile in Egypt, Assyria – and finally Babylon – before they come trembling to their Creator God. They have persisted and persisted in the idolatry that is their delight – in the face of God’s extreme displeasure.

God declares that he will not obliterate Israel from the earth, as he did the wicked cities in the time of Abraham. The curse declared by Moses against those who break the covenant of the Lord was this: *The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur--nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in fierce anger. (Dt 29:23)* It is the desire of God’s

great, fatherly heart never to ruin the land utterly – never to destroy His people entirely. But there are always consequences for sin. This is why Jesus’ warning is so strong to this young man who asks for his fair share of the family inheritance.

Luke’s telling of the gospel is describing the journey to Jerusalem – Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem. He has paused here to tell this parable. He is about to pay the price for all the ways of the old man, the old woman – all the ways of the fallen heart: *fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed (which is idolatry)...(Col 3:5)* Christ’s witness is this: *"Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being."* (Mt 6:19-21, MSG)

The work of Christ is not just urging you and me to put away vices and pick up virtues. Instead, in His death our old, fallen way of life ends, and we

enter into Christ's new, unending resurrection life. This life is the most important gift in the universe. Life in this world will end in any case. It ends for the righteous; it ends for the unrighteous. Your God, who has the power to reduce each of us to dust – desires to take us with him into his paradise. There is *joy unspeakable and full of glory* in store for those who are *rich toward God*. Amen.