

Eighth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/C): "You Can't Take It With You!"
Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23
Psalm 49:1-12; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21
August 3-4, 2019

We all know the saying: "You can't take it with you." (Usually it's given as a reason to live it up now!) The Spanish version of that translates: "There are no pockets in a shroud." The Egyptians didn't agree. If you've seen any of the King Tut exhibits over the years, or visited the Egyptian section of any museum, you may remember the tomb excavations of tiny statues of priests, boats the size a kid floats in the bathtub, and miniature versions of whatever was believed necessary in the afterlife, found packed into the coffins of royalty or placed in rooms within the pyramids that served as royal tombs. Archaeologists have translated hieroglyphics in *The Book of the Dead*, incantations to perform a reverse shrinky-dink process, intended to bring people and objects back to life-size when needed.

We Christians believe everything we need in Heaven will be provided for us and that we won't need to lug any luggage ☺. But there are various stories, object lessons, about what St. Peter will or won't let us take along when we hopefully pass through the pearly gates one day. A friend who babysat Kristiane "way back when" told her that if we take something that isn't ours, it will end up in a little red wagon that we have to pull behind us when we go to heaven. The flip side of that story is a saying that I found on a prayer card, "The only things we'll end up with are the ones we have given away." Obviously that's **encouragement to be generous!**

Today's Gospel encourages us to be generous, too, although the straight-up message is a warning against greed – greed, one of the seven deadly sins; greed, referred to as "idolatry" in our second lesson from Colossians (Col. 3:5); greed, subject of two of the "thou shalt not's" in the 10

Commandments. (“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s spouse; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s goods.”)

The Romans had this little piece of wisdom: “Money is like sea water; the more you drink, the thirstier you become.” That seems to describe the fellow referred to as “the rich fool,” the prime player in the parable Jesus tells us this weekend. In response to the **blessing**, the **bounty** of his crops, he becomes a miserly hoarder instead of a glad and generous giver. Too much to store in 1 silo?? Build another! Ensure a cushy retirement! “Mine, all mine!” “Eat, drink, and be merry!” (Luke 12:19b) (Isn’t it funny how people can be quoting Scripture and not even realize it??) And God says:

“You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

(Luke 12: 20)

The answer to that question is found in both the 1st lesson from Ecclesiastes (1:18-19) and Psalm 49 (v. 10): they’ll go to those who come after, whether they’re wise or silly, deserving or not. “You can’t take it with you” – “Have you ever seen a hearse hauling a U-Haul?”

Our real concern, though, isn’t what happens to our stuff once we’re gone, but while we’re still here. **God tracks what we’ve given away**, not what we’ve accumulated. We’re not just talking money, either. How generous – or not – are we with our blessings: our time, our talent, our treasure, our health, our creativity, our hospitality? Do we realize that many of the blessings that come **to** us are intended to flow **through** us to others? Do we have crystal clear vision that we are blessed **to be** a blessing? That God answers a heap of prayers directly through people? That human generosity is a powerful channel of God’s grace?

If we’re not generous, maybe it’s because we’re feathering our own nest in a greedy way – or maybe it’s because we find the security we long for in our possessions. ‘Which isn’t to say that a

roof over our heads isn't a **very** good thing. But are we concerned enough about those who **don't** have a roof over their heads that we do our part to afford them the blessing of a home, a blessing that we enjoy and they can only dream about?

A big question here is: where **do** we find our security? In the parable, Jesus is telling us, **don't** count on your bank account, ultimately! The goal, of course, is for us to "fear, love and trust **God** above all else." (See Luther's Small Catechism.)

As I write this, I'm remembering and smiling about the cans on the shelves in my parents' pantry. At some point my mom took inventory and came up with something like 22 cans of cream of mushroom soup, 15 of tomato, and about the same of tuna. "Lee, there are only 2 of us!" she'd say in frustration. But Dad was a teenager during the Great Depression. His love of a sale and stockpiling of food staples was born out of a childhood where every bit of food was recognized as precious, nothing was wasted, and Lord help the person who didn't finish what was put on his or her plate!

That's just part of the picture, though: I've gotta say that my dad who was always very **frugal with himself** was also incredibly **generous with others**. He knew that his worth in God's eyes had nothing to do with his "personal worth," that unfortunate term we use for someone's financial means, cash value.

Another way to say, "*...one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions*" is: "*Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot.*" (Luke 12:15c, *The Message*) The other side of that coin is: "Life is not defined by what you don't have, even when you have very little." Instead, our life is defined by Whom we trust to provide our daily bread. It is defined by Whom we serve other than our own interests. **A wise person has said, "... things possess us unless we are possessed by God."**¹

Next week's Gospel is the continuation of today's. It's a beauty and begins, *"I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the lilies of the field...."* (Luke 12:22-24) Lay aside anxiety about the future. Thank God for the blessings of today. Trust God for the blessings which will come tomorrow.

Gratitude leads to generosity and joy. Greed leads to miserliness and misery.

Stay tuned for next week's message: *"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

¹*Interpreter's Bible*, Volume 8, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1952), p. 231.

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