

“Kept and Lost” or “Given and Gained”

As we turn to the Gospel lesson this morning, I would also direct your attention to the Bulletin, to a place inside that is titled Sermon Notes. I've listed there some key questions that the passage of Scripture, and Jesus' teaching, could and probably should raise in our minds.

The questions revolve around this key question this morning – Kept and Lost, or, Given and Gained. What would you be worth, if you lost all your money?

As you listen to Jesus' words, and my effort in the sermon to relate His words to our lives, keep the questions in mind - maybe even jot down your thoughts - yes - even while I'm preaching - or later. The Scripture is the Rich Farmer and his barns.... The questions are:

What things do I need to live? Food, Drink, Clothes, Shelter, Safety, Work, Love and Family and Friendship....

What things do I want to live with? Yes, for me, probably golf, before T.V.

If I see something I want, can I just give thanks for what I have instead? It's hard - when something newer, bigger, better is always out there.

What could I give away tomorrow? Not sure about you - but I think maybe I could give 90% of what I have, away, and still be rich.

What could I do with what I don't spend, on what I don't need? I've been to Africa, Honduras, and Mexico, and the Gulf Coast, and Baldwin Center and Fort Street Soup Kitchen - and I have some passion for our Build To Share Program... So maybe the percent of what I have that I share isn't big enough.

Questions - questions that these words of Jesus seem to be asking me to answer. So listen now, and hear the Gospel message this morning, and listen to your own inner voice.

GOSPEL OF LUKE 12:13- 21

Jesus doesn't tell us what to do, does he? Did you hear that in the lesson? But Jesus did and does offer guidance for all who want to follow him and his way. Did you hear that? Take care - guard against all kinds of greed? For life is not about the stuff that you have.

And Jesus tells a story, about a man and his things. And in many ways it is my story, our story, too, isn't it? Because we have many many things. Even in these challenging economic times in Michigan, when jobs are uncertain, or gone, and stocks bounce up and down, and net worth changes by the moment, and mostly down.

Still, we have many many things.... Attics, basements and garages full of what doesn't fit in our rooms and closets. And the question is - isn't it always - do we have a sense of what belongs to God?

If you and I checked up on our emotional, mental and economic health, how much of who we are, and what we have, does God get credit for, does God get? In other words, Jesus' words, can we, in some way, in any way, say and show that we are rich toward God?

Please pray with me.

Lord of life, may the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, be acceptable in your sight, and your good word to us this day. In Christ. Amen.

Rich towards God. Can we show that we are rich toward God? How care-fully, and, yes, help-fully, Jesus puts the issue of wealth. Is it wrong, sinful, un-Christian to be wealthy? And Jesus, often called son of David, who was very rich, never says it is a sin. He simply taught the truth in different terms. Are you rich toward God? That's Jesus' word, and his worry, and his test.

Remember the story of the widow and her two mites? Jesus never said the rich man was wrong because he gave too little. He simply said the woman was right, because she was rich in her faith in, her trust in, her confidence in God.

In effect Jesus asks a simple question, and leaves it for each of us to answer. Are we rich toward God? What priority does the source, the creator, of all we have and are and can ever hope to be... what priority does God get in our lives?

Jesus sets up no system of judgement, no standard of giving. He never mentions a figure, not even the Old Testament Tithe - or 10%. He just asks the probing question - are we rich toward God?

When that infamous book of life is closed for us - Jesus wonders with us - what the record will show? And yes, Jesus made it very clear, there are consequences to how we live...and give. Godly consequences.

But there are some earthly consequences, to be sure. We can become consumed by what we consume. Forty pounds overweight watching a \$4,000 flat screen T.V. 40-hours a week is probably not being rich toward God...and it has some not happy earthly consequences, too.

And we can, as someone has said, win the rat race to riches, and, in the end, we're just the winning rat.

Wealthy as we Americans are, compared to the rest of the world, strangely we rank very low compared to other countries on how happy we are with our lives. If wealth, having things, guaranteed happiness, we should be the happiest people on earth, and we are not.

Because? - Because maybe it takes a real toll on us, keeping up with the Joneses, and then taking care of the stuff in our closets, garages, basements, and attics. And, though Jesus never sets down a goal for our giving, never offers tithing as a law, there is some good Biblical wisdom that can help us live as people who are rich toward God.

The idea of the tithe is the idea of proportionate giving - giving a set percentage as a starting point, a basis of sharing, of being rich toward God and others. And it works. If you have a little or you have a lot - you share. You are blessed with success, so is God's work blessed.

And though Jesus set no figures, the figure we choose makes a difference. Too low a percentage, and we are not rich toward God at all. For then what we give causes us no real thought, no conscious consecration, no struggle or sacrifice, or sense of God really having a share in our time, talent and dollars.

Too high a percentage - well - let's be honest - that has never ever been a problem for anyone I've ever known. I seriously doubt whether that's a problem for any of us. I've seen people gamble and spend themselves into deep trouble, but never by giving too much to God's work.

Uncle Sam tells you what to give - Jesus simply asks the probing question - are we rich toward God. And leaves the question hanging... hanging.... Leaves it for us to figure out - if we are - if by the way we live and give - we are rich toward God. Are our hearts right - seeking to share our blessings with any of God's people who are in need.

We've heard mission reports this morning - places and people where our gifts help share the good news of God's love. And as we build here - no less than the Campbell's 130 some years ago - we build to share our faith far down the future's way - a faith that will help us, and many others after us, be rich toward God.

Are our figures right? Is the percent of what we share significant enough for us to say we've tried to be rich toward God? If we did the math, checked our check books, or our quicken software, would anyone see, can we see, that God's work has a priority in our lives?

It is one of the reminders for us in this Sacrament - and no doubt Jesus knew it would be.

A check-up for us every time we celebrate it. This do in remembrance of me - of Jesus, of a life rich in how it was lived for God. As often as you do this, Jesus said, you show the Lord's death - his total self giving - till he comes. Here we practice the very truth of life - that we are blessed to be a blessing. Life, symbols of what sustains life, bread and cup, given to us - and then, then - shared by us with others - rich in our caring, our loving, toward God and God's people. Remember the questions in the bulletin as a guide.

But - come now - here. Come again, or for the first time - to this table, to this Celebration. Come and know anew the wonder of God's rich love for you, and hear anew, God's call to you, and to me, richly blessed as are, to be a blessing to others, rich in our love for God. Amen.

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