

Pentecost 11\_Year C\_Proper 13\_080413  
All Saints Episcopal Church

"The one who dies with the most toys, wins."

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and sanctifier. Amen.

When I first moved down here from Nashville, I remember that a lot of large SUVs and trucks had this bumper sticker on them: *'The one who dies with the most toys, wins.'* In light of today's lesson, we can say, "Not so. Not so." But I have a question: as we were listening to the Gospel lesson for today, how many of us thought that the words aimed at the rich man were aimed at us? How many of us think of ourselves as rich?

Some years ago, economist Robert Heilbroner came up with a little mental exercise to help us see what life is like for one and a half billion people in the world; 1500 million of God's beloved children living in what the World Bank calls "extreme poverty." Try to imagine these things:

- Take all the furniture out of your home, except one table and a couple of chairs. Use a blanket and pads for a bed.
- Take away all of your clothing, except each person's oldest dress, pants, shirt, blouse, and coat. Only one pair of shoes per person.
- Empty the pantry, the refrigerator and the freezer of all food except for a small bag of flour, some sugar and salt, and a few potatoes, some onions and some dried beans.
- Dismantle the bathroom, shut off the running water, and remove all the electrical wiring in your house.
- Take away the house itself and move the family into the tool shed.
- Move out of your neighborhood into a ghetto of makeshift buildings and mud streets.
- Cancel all subscriptions to newspapers and magazines and get rid of all your books. This is no great loss, since none of you can read anyway.
- Get rid of TVs, cell phones, computers and all other electronic gizmos. Leave one radio for the entire community.
- Move the nearest hospital or clinic to a day's walk away. Replace the doctor with a midwife.
- Throw away all your bankbooks, stock certificates, pension plans, and insurance policies. Your family has \$10 of cash hidden in a coffee can.

- Give yourselves a few acres to grow crops on which you earn \$500 a year. Pay a third of that in rent and 10% to loan sharks.
- Lop 25 years off your life expectancy.

*(Robert Heilbroner, The Great Ascent, Chapter 2, numbers adjusted for inflation)*

By this comparison, most of us in this country are the rich people in the world, and it is as rich people that we must listen to Jesus today.

As the text begins, Jesus is out and about, teaching and preaching. Someone in the crowd calls out and asks him to settle a family dispute about inheritance. Well, actually, he doesn't ask him; he tells Jesus what he wants him to do and what he wants him to say. "Hey Jesus, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!" He wants to use Jesus to give religious credibility to his own greediness.

Jesus refuses to be drawn into this family matter and instead warns the man and the crowd (and us), against the dangers of desire, the menace of materialism: "One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

Then Jesus tells the story of the rich man who just keeps on getting richer. He already has barns, and his barns are already full, and now he has all this other grain. What is he to do with it? He has more than most people, more than he needs. What to do? Well, he decides to build more barns. He decides to stake his future on the accumulation of more stuff. By tearing down his old barns and cashing in his CDs, he refinances and builds new and bigger barns and now he is set!

Notice that when the rich man talks in this parable, he talks only to himself, and the only person he refers to is himself: "What should *I* do, for *I* have no place to store my crops?" "*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'"

The rich man thinks he's got it made, but God comes to him and says, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

Jesus repeatedly told us you can't serve both God and money; but one can serve God through the use of one's money. Everything we have, right down to the last breath we take, God has given to us. And God's judgment of us will have little to do

with what we have and everything to do with what we have done with it.

God has given us what we have, not for ourselves, but for the benefit of the community and for hospitality to strangers. This is true, whether we are talking about our personal, individual goods, or the goods we hold in common as a congregation, as the church.

In his parable, Jesus reminds us that we will all die someday; it is not a question of if, only of when and how. And at the inevitable moment of our death, all of our accumulated possessions will be worthless to us.

As a matter of fact, our possessions could be worse than worthless to us. If the care and maintenance of our stuff has diverted us from the care and maintenance of our souls, the very things we cherish in this life will have been that which has ruined us for eternity. As Jesus said, "So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

We have a unique opportunity as a community here at All Saints to use some of our treasure to help a family of our own. As most of you know by now, I hope, the father of the Kuot family, our friends from South Sudan, has abandoned his family and gone to another state to work - perhaps to earn enough money to return to Africa. No one knows what will really happen.

This is a genuine crisis for them. Ayen, the mother, has only worked at home as a childcare giver to young children of other refugees, but she gets paid sporadically - when the parents are able to pay her. Her English skills are limited, which makes employers hesitant to hire her, but she is willing to get a job. She thinks a job as a housekeeper in a home or business might be good. The children - 1 in college, 2 in high school, 1 in middle school and 1 in elementary - are aware of the situation and will do their best to contribute to the family income. Only 2 of them are 16 or older. Transportation is an issue.

Members of the Refugee Committee are working to coming up with ways to assist them in this dilemma, but we cannot do it alone. We need the prayers AND the help of everyone - whether it is helping to find jobs, helping to pay bills or raise money, or helping transport family members to school and doctor's appointments. There is something each one of us can do to help.

Now, I'm not trying to 'guilt' anybody into helping. But I do want us all to think about how much we have, and about how good it feels to give it away - not to the point that we, then, are in true need of the things that are life-sustaining. But considering that this family has come from a life where the norm was the same as the 1.5 billion people in the list at the beginning of the sermon, surely we as a community can share our bounty with them to help them get on their feet.

God has made us a part of the rich people of this world. God has placed in our hands all that we are and all that we have. What will we do with what we have been given?

Amen.