

Proper 13 Year C

“Take care. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

Well that’s pretty clear isn’t it? Sometimes the parables told by Jesus are cryptic, and sometimes they have double or hidden meaning...sometimes fraught with irony... sometimes slippery to get a hold of...but today’s parable hits head on...those who spend their life storing up treasures...their life will be taken from them...and those who are “rich in God will live abundantly.” We only have to hear this once every three years thank God...because storing up treasure, in whatever myriad manifestation “storing up” means...storing up has become a hallmark of our culture in which consumption reigns supreme.....This is of course a re-occurring theme in Luke...this writer warning us time and again about the preoccupation with wealth and possessions, greed in short...more about possessions than wealth...because wealth in the ancient world had to do solely with land and livestock and property...financial wealth as we know it today, cash instruments and stocks and bonds and derivatives did not exist...for Luke wealth is our possessions.

I’m reminded of a scene in an old Woody Allen movie of the summer of 1975 called *Love and Death*. Early on in the movie Boris the protagonist played by Woody Allen observes one of the townspeople of a Russian Jewish village calling across his uncle Andre’s fence....The neighbor entreats... “Andre, Andre are you now ready to sell me your land?” And Andre answers holding up literally a foot square of turf...and he says... “No Ivan, this land is not for sale!” It’s hilarious and absurd but sometimes the absurd points us to profound truth...and in this case, one is asked to question the notion that is there really such a thing as owning property...for in truth what things we have claim upon today... the generations will bear away...after we are long gone whose stuff will it be.....some fool’s perhaps.

I believe that the author of Luke is saying that to live for our so-called possessions as an end unto themselves, that our lives will be required of us...our lives being all of our labor and love and creativity and passion, and that this life force will be drained in the service of self alone. Now I’ve heard preachers ladle out the guilt here...In fact I remember there was a church in Enterprise Al. whose late service was broadcast by a local Dothan radio station...the preacher’s sermon was always wrapping up about the time we were on our way home from church...and during the summer the preacher would always devote one sermon to the upbraiding of parishioners who had beach places, for not being in church, and pleasuring themselves on the Lord’s day...of course I always marveled that he was speaking to the people who were actually there in church. I’m not going to do that.

Guilt is not what Luke has in mind here. Moreover I think this is directed not so much to individuals but to the ethical practice of community... Luke, as the other Gospel writers endeavor, is trying in high rhetorical fashion to speak of a way of life...to move us into this way of life that is of God.... to speak of the way of the Christ...the way of the kingdom...the true way of life God intends for us...a way of life that brings life....and not just for the sake of the faithful, but for the sake of all....that is not to say that this parable isn’t edgy...parables will try to push our buttons in any way they can...in this case the mere mention of a wealthy landowner to Luke’s audience, who would more

likely be the workers of such land, working for the pleasure of the owner...and many of these landowners lived elsewhere...Such an introduction would have made them bristle...but Luke would have their attention, as he no doubt gets ours, we now the landowner.

So let's look at this text: First we are told that the land produced abundantly...the landowner didn't produce the fruits...the land did...And then the landowner has a conversation with himself...there is no village, no neighbors...he's all alone...he refers to my land, my crops, my grain, my barns, my goods...in the Greek, the word *my* stands out as almost staccato in the narrative...Of course any good Jew or Jewish Christian of the day would have been taught in Torah that the land, and all that comes from it, is God's...that we are sojourners in this life by God's gracious favor...sojourners who tend the created order with all due care...and that what the land yields is to be shared...that's Torah...and the prophets over the ages keep red in the face telling his or her people that we are stewards...And once we believe the delusion that we are to serve ourselves alone...then that's when the trouble comes...we all know that...the recent financial debacle in this country and in the world still playing itself out is a garish example...Luke is exhorting us to not waste our artistry on things that pass away, to waste our human artistry on things that have no life in themselves...things that divide and isolate...but to give our lives to the true and the good, a life that engenders artful fraternity...brotherhood...sisterhood...a community of equals.

The point I want to make, recognizing that here is a wise teacher giving us sage advice as to how to live; Luke is saying to us: It is not wealth I'm condemning; wealth is necessary...What I am condemning is foolishness... "You fool", God says to the landowner...your love of possessions has sapped the life out of you...and he says to us that to truly live we must be rich in God...rich in God

I think Luke is speaking of a predisposition here, this richness in God...a predisposition to live as God lives... that all that we are and all that we have, our love, our labor, our creativity, our passion are all meant to serve the greater good...a life of sacrifice...the way God lives...that is God's predisposition...to serve the good and the true, the balance of life...and what is the greater good, the greater good that we name as God's kingdom, the commonweal of the faithful... well that remains to be seen...But it is something that at all costs we are meant to discover in our lives together as people of this way...this way not of serving self, but of serving all in generous mutuality...the storehouse of abundance unlocked and shared for the good of the whole...and in so living there is **life**.

Great things indeed can be done with wealth...indeed great things have been done and are being done with wealth...so the admonition today is to be wise with all that we are, our wealth and power, the state of our soul, the use of wealth and power a symbol of the state of our soul... a soul not alone but in artful community with others of conscience...the admonition is to not be foolish...now I believe that is hard work. It takes hard work not to be a fool...It takes study and imagination, it requires paying attention, this discernment of the greater good...but we're up to it by the wisdom we have in this way of Christ, which has everything to do with how we live and learn with and from each other....

And I think, according to Luke, that the first step is to recognize that we own nothing, we possess nothing...that God owns everything...and that includes our very

lives. We don't own our lives, our lives are borrowed, only to be returned... We don't own our lives... God does... and to claim that and to live into that as if it were true... I believe that in such a life there is great freedom and promise and hope and the abundant life we all seek... The true abundant life that is meant for all... the abundant life of sacrifice and generosity and hospitality that binds us in community, brothers and sisters of dare I say a *functional family*... a new found freedom that feels like freedom.

We, brothers and sisters, being inhabitants of a wealthy land, are all wealthy according to the world's standards, some more than others... Luke in his writing didn't know about a middle class... and we also know that the Jesus movement had some wealthy patrons to provide for them... but don't set your hearts and minds on wealth; don't worry about possessions... worry about the foolishness of a world that beguiles us into thinking that we are self reliant, that wealth itself is the prize, the singular goal... that we should fear scarcity... No, we are people of the abundant life in Christ in which there is enough, always... Don't worry about if you'll have enough... worry about the foolishness... Let us not be fools abdicating our lives, but let us in God's grace become wise... wise for the world's sake... rich in God... rich in the art of life... rich in that which shall never pass away... let us dare not be fools.