

Sermon      10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost    August 1, 2010

Let me share with you a story of an eastern guru, who had a disciple, and was so pleased with the man's progress that he decided he could leave him on his own. The man lived in a little mud hut. He lived simply, begging for his food. Each morning, after his devotions, the disciple washed his loincloth and hung it out to dry.

One day he came back to discover his loincloth had been torn and eaten by rats. He begged the villagers for another, and they gave it to him. But the rats ate that one, too. So he got himself a cat. That took care of the rats, but now when he begged for his food he had to beg for milk for his cat as well.

"This won't do," he thought. "I'll get a cow." So he got a cow and found now he had to beg now for feed for the cow. So he decided to till and plant the ground around his hut.

But soon he found no time for spiritual practices, so he hired servants to tend his farm. But overseeing the labors became a chore, so he got married to have a wife to help him.

After a while, the disciple became the wealthiest man in the village.

His teacher was traveling by there one day and was shocked to see that where there used to be a simple mud hut there now loomed a palace surrounded by a vast estate, worked by many servants. "What is the meaning of this?" he asked his disciple. "You won't believe this sir," the man replied. "But there was really no other way for me to keep my loincloth."

As I read today's gospel reading this story came to my mind. For it demonstrates in a light way how possessions can take over our lives. In today's Gospel reading Jesus warns us: *"Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."*

This was Jesus' reaction to the request of a man who asked Jesus to tell his brother to divide the family inheritance with him. And so Jesus shares with them this parable. There was rich man whose land produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, *"What should I do, for I have no place for my crops?"* We know that this man was already rich, but this time he landed an abundant crop and so he pauses and thinks, and you can see that smile on his face as he starts

to envision great things for himself. (pause) And then this parable continues with what I believe is the most self centered passage in the Bible, just pay attention to the “Is”. The rich man says: *“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.’* (pause)

What does Jesus try to say through this parable? Well he tackles couple things. The first one is greed and he already mentioned greed before he told the story when he said: “be on your guard against all kinds of greed.” Now what is greed? It is an excessive desire for wealth and possessions and Jesus says be on your guard against this desire. Then Jesus talks about abundance. What is abundance? It’s an extremely plentiful or over sufficient quantity or supply of in our case possessions. And Jesus says: one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. (pause) And so we have greed and abundance, and on the top of that Jesus points out self-centeredness. *“What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops? (pause)* Let me ask you a question. How do we spell the word sin? S i n. Nope. Would anyone else like to try? It’s s I n. And it is that “I” that separates us from God. I’ve heard this cool illustration that said: there is Holy Trinity which characterizes God’s reign, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and then there is the unholy trinity, that characterized the reign of this world and it is: Me, Myself and I. (pause) But let us get back to our story for there is one last thing that Jesus points out, and that is security. Something all of us are looking for in this unstable world. The man in the story was looking for security. He said: *“I have all these things stored up, now I can relax.”*

**And so Jesus points out these four things, the greed, abundance, self-centeredness connected to that desire for security, and he says, it’s foolish to live for these things. For our lives cannot be measured or defined by what we have, but by who we truly are. Do you see that distinction between having and being? Jesus takes the idea of richness and abundance and turns it from what we possess to the relativity of our relationship with God. He says, instead of living your life for these material things, be rich toward God and he ties our security into being rich toward God or rich in a relationship with God. (pause)**

Were you kind of expecting that Jesus would say something like this? It’s liberating, isn’t it? Knowing that our lives aren’t defined by what we have or what we want but by the

relationship with our God who loves us unconditionally and cares for us? God blessed us all abundantly; we were blessed with material things, with many talents, abilities, with time, we were blessed with relationships, with a church family and with a promise of eternal life. The question is what are we going to do with all these blessings and treasures? Are we going to store them up for ourselves, or are we going to use them in being rich toward God? (pause)

I know we all want to be rich toward God. And one way to do so is by living a life that belongs to Christ. Living a life filled with relationships of love, compassion and generosity. Living a life **to its full potential** as we listen to God's calling. (pause) I would like to conclude this sermon with showing you something I came across this week. I found this in the library. It's a scrap book of the beginnings of this congregation. I'd like to read this one part from it ....

Pastor Riede lived a life that was rich toward God, he moved into this area to start a church, he and his family and many others that are in these pictures, some are gone, some of you are still sitting here today, all of these faithful disciples decided to live a life rich toward God and look at the legacy they left behind. This beautiful building that can be each Sunday filled with people seeking God's love, 85 marriages, 37 burials where the hope of Christ could have been shared with the grieving, 133 baptisms, 89 confirmands, and countless number of worship services, retreats and picnics, vacation Bible schools and meals for the poor, hospital visits, Christmas pagans and fellowship hours during which the relationships of love could have been built, strengthen and nourished. That's what it means to be rich toward God.

My prayer is that as individuals and as a congregation we'll be able to take today's words of Jesus to heart. That we'll be able to look at our lives, look at the things we have been blessed with and use them to continue with this wonderful legacy of God's love in our midst. My prayer is that our lives, families and relationships will not be defined by possessions but by the richness of God's love and mercy.

Amen