

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23

1:2 Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

1:12 I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem,

1:13 applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with.

1:14 I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

2:18 I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me

2:19 --and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.

2:20 So I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labors under the sun,

2:21 because sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.

2:22 What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun?

2:23 For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity.

Luke 12:13-21

12:13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

12:14 But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?"

12:15 And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

12:16 Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly.

12:17 And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?'

12:18 Then he said, '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.

12:19 And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'

12:20 But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

12:21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Proclamation of the Word

Most of you know that next Saturday, our church is holding a yard sale to benefit our service missions to places like Haiti and Guatemala. Many of you have donated items which is wonderful. One of my

tasks on my stay-cation this month was to clean out closets and gather things to share. When we do this, if you are like me, it makes one think about how much stuff we have accumulated over time. It is truly freeing to let things go sometimes. But I will say I struggle with stuff. There is stuff that I once found necessary and useful. I examine it and realize I don't need it anymore and someone else can benefit from it. But, and you know what I mean, there are things that we just cannot let go.

One of the things I found was my Mimi's Bundt pan. Mimi was my great aunt who never married and lived on the family farm into her old age. Her brothers and sisters moved to town and left the farm. Those who went to college left the state. During the Depression, my Grand Daddy worked and played Textile League baseball to help put his younger brothers through Clemson. Mimi, Aunt Emily, was like an extra grandmother to us. She would rise with the sun, go pick strawberries and vegetables in her garden, wash up, and go work as a clerk at the local Belk Department store. I am sure she bought that Bundt pan with her employee discount some 50 years ago. It is sturdy, solid, American-made aluminum. They really don't make them like they used to. She also slept with a pistol under her pillow- which is another story. This is a woman who had no hot water heater, but boiled water on the stove to wash dishes in a dish pan. She would never see herself as poor because she had what she needed. I would watch her at Belk advising customers on house-wares and kitchen tools. Mimi was famous in town for her pecan pies, artichoke pickle, biscuits, and her pound cakes. Mimi lived alone, so her cooking was always a gift to be shared with others. Man, you knew Mimi loved you if she made you a pound cake. Pound cakes showed up when there was a death, an illness, a birthday. They were like gold for the amount of butter and time that went into them.

So on my staycation, I made pound cakes, using her famous recipe. In one of them, I cut corners, spraying the pan with canola oil rather than buttering it up by hand. That pound cake was stuck. I hung it upside down. I tried prying it out, steaming it out, even freezing it! I made it because my brother Rob came to visit. He advised that he had better luck with a flexible silicone pan you could pop it out. What? I was not going to use a fake pan when I had the real thing! Then I realized I was being stubborn which was also a trait of my Mimi's. I also pictured my 55 year old brother who runs a hospital system trying to bake Mimi's pound cake, too, which makes me smile. We both associate pound cake with her deep and abiding love for us. Part of my love of that pan and that recipe was because of my love for her. I wanted to do it just like Mimi did. I learned from her that you can show your love and care for others through sharing what you make with your hands. From Mimi, I learned to give. That is a lesson that will outlast the pan, but I still cannot let go of that pan. I am attached. It is my inheritance, a piece of my childhood, my great-aunt Mimi, my values, the farm that now belongs to someone else. Next time though, I will use butter on the pan, just like Mimi did.

We all get attached to stuff. We treasure different things for different reasons, but stuff and money come attached with emotions and meaning. Maybe that is why Jesus taught so much about stuff, possessions, and wealth. The use of money and possession comes up almost more than any other

subject in the Bible. Maybe because it is the most spiritual of issues. Where do you place your trust? In things or in the God who created and loves you? Trust is at the heart of our accumulation of wealth and possessions. These are matters of the heart and soul according to Jesus. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also, Jesus says in Luke 12:34.

The place of money in our lives, in our hearts, is telling. Money can be the cause of conflict in marriages, municipalities, churches, schools, and businesses. It is the love of money that can be a problem, "the root of all kinds of evil" according to 1 Timothy 6:10.

The Romans had a proverb, "Money is like seawater, the more you drink, the thirstier you become."ⁱ I see many people striving to make money, to accumulate possessions, and keep up with the Joneses. It is a greediness that eats at one's soul. Striving for self leaves one feeling empty, alone, and frustrated like the writer in Ecclesiastes. "I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind. I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me."

There was an ambitious young man speaking with a wise, older man. Said the young man, "I will learn my trade." "And then?" said the older man. "I will start my business." "And then?" asked the older man. "I will make my fortune." said the young man. "And then?" asked the older man. "I suppose I will grow old, retire, and enjoy my money." "And then?" "Well, I suppose someday I will die. Then came the stabbing question, "And then?"ⁱⁱ

In the end, we have one another and God. In struggling with my call to serve the church in Seminary and feeling conflicted about also being a faithful spouse and mother, my mentor in ministry said, "Remember no one looks back on life at retirement and says, I wish I had gone to more meetings or made more money. They say, I wish I had spent time loving the people God placed in my life." I always try to remember that.

The man encounters Jesus asking Jesus to tell his brother to divide the family inheritance. Jesus refuses, but tells him a story prefaced by a warning, "Beware of all kinds of greed, for your life does not consist of an abundance of possessions." The greedy farmer has a bumper crop and a dilemma. He has to figure out how to keep all that he has. His barn is not big enough. What would be a gift to be shared to some, becomes his problem. Listen to the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases it in *The Message*,

'Here's what I'll do: I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll gather in all my grain and goods, and I'll say to myself, Self, you've done well! You've got it made and can now retire. Take it easy and have the time of your life!'

²⁰ "Just then God showed up and said, 'Fool! Tonight you die. And your barnful of goods—who gets it?'

²¹ **“That’s what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God.”**

Here is the man who has everything, but is the biggest fool of all. God, the creator of the universe himself even directly address him. "Fool! Tonight you die." Look at the pronouns. Eleven times the man says, "I, me, mine." He is self-centered. Never once does he mention others: you, us, we. He has no one to share it with, no concern for those in his community who may be without so much. This is vanity of vanities- storing up treasures for self.

Commenting on this passage, David Lose writes,

More than this blatant narcissism – or perhaps because of this narcissism – the farmer falls prey to the notion that he can secure his own future. That he needs no one, depends on no one, and can go it alone. Which is why God calls him foolish. Because, in the end, not only is he not immune to death, but he will die alone, and all that he has stored up will not comfort or protect him, nor will it go to others who loved and respected him and can put it to good use, but instead it will all turn to dust in the wind.

ⁱⁱⁱ(David Lose)

Dust in the wind. In the end, we are dust and to dust we shall return. We rehearse this reality every Ash Wednesday in this Sanctuary. Life is short. All we have is a gift from God's good grace. And it is meant to be shared. Ultimately, whether we do or not is a matter of the heart, or where we place our trust. Do we trust God or not?

In fact, Jesus ends with this command. "Be rich toward God." When God is first in our hearts, we can trust and rely on Him. We know whose we are and can rest easy in God's loving purpose for our lives. We direct our hearts toward seeking first the kingdom of God. And God's kingdom is always communal. What the Barn guy doesn't get is that is one way that God provides. We share what we have. That shows where our heart is -giving, sharing, God and other directed. According to the gospel of Luke, being rich towards God looks like....

Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening, loving, and learning from her Lord (Luke 10:38-42)

A despised, good Samaritan taking care of his neighbor by providing for his injuries and housing. (Luke 10:25-37)

Prayerfully trusting God to provide and persisting in prayer (Luke 11:1-13; 12:22-31)

Sharing possessions and giving to support the poor (Luke 12:32-34)

That is being rich toward God.

In our house the Musical *Hamilton* is all the rage with our history buff, Hallie. So we have reacquainted ourselves with our founding fathers, the Skyler sisters, and our country's friends like Marquis de

Lafayette, who helped the American colonists during our War of Independence from Britain. The story is told...

When LaFayette returned home to France, he lived on his big estates and did very well. He was in the same social class as the rich man in Jesus' parable, but acted very differently. In 1783, after a poor harvest, Lafayette's workers were still able to fill his barns with wheat. "The bad harvest has raised the price of wheat," said one of his workers. "This is the time to sell." Lafayette thought about the hungry peasants in the surrounding villages. "No," he replied, "this is the time to give."

This is the time to give. When we know the God who gave all for us, we, made in God's image, are called to give- not out of compulsion, but out of love.

So be rich toward God. Give your goods to the Church Yard Sale. Take a pound cake to a neighbor. Share your money to build up the church of Jesus Christ, and serve neighbors in need. See if there is anything needed this week as we host 3 homeless families through Family Promise. Now is the time to give. In doing so, you will find meaning, purpose, joy.

God is the source of all good gifts. Our toil, our treasure, our lives belong to God. But more than anything, God wants our hearts.

Be rich toward God and in doing so you will find abundant life.

ⁱ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Westminster-John Knox: Louisville, 1975), 195.

ⁱⁱ Barclay, 196.

ⁱⁱⁱ David Lose, "Pentecost 11C From Isolation to Community," ... *In the Meantime* <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/07/pentecost-11-c-from-isolation-to-community/>, Monday, July 25, 2016 used on 7-31-2016.