

Provoked by the Parables at Brentwood Presbyterian

The Rich Fool

June 19, 2011

**Psalm 8 and Luke 12:13-21
(Hymns –281, 403, 358, 624)**

A major concern in the Gospel of Luke,
and throughout the life of the early church
as recorded in Acts and seen in the letters of Paul
is how wealth and resources are used.

Almost every chapter in both the Gospel and the Acts of Apostles
contains some reference to our relationship to material things.
Luke is concerned for the poor, denounces the abuse of riches,
and repeatedly emphasizes that discipleship involves
a major reorientation of our thinking about wealth.

Our use of possessions, he is saying clearly, is a revelation
of our true selves.

There is a pattern in current Western thinking
that is profoundly challenged by this parable.

It is this:

My security and happiness lie in the possessions I have.
The more things I have,
the more secure and happier I will be.
Buy this, use that, invest here, hire me
and all will be well with your body and soul.

Luke's challenge is this:

Your security and happiness arise from a profound trust in God,
not from possessions like money and big buildings.

There is a hunger in the depths of human beings
that is not satisfied by material things.

It is a hunger for a loving relationship with our Creator,
It is a hunger for the grace
that comes from the God who came to us in Jesus Christ
to restore us to the relationship he originally intended.

It is the richness of that redemption that draws us into this community,
that brings us together to worship each week,
that generates a yearning to learn more about God's grace,
and that encourages us to reach out as blessings to others.

Every now and then,
as I think most of you know,
I play around with acronyms,
those lists of words where the first letters create a key word.

This week, as I reflected on this parable of the Rich Fool,
a new acronym came to me for GRACE.
It summarizes, for me at least, the true riches that keep us wise.

It attempts to capture a Christian understanding of riches
– what is most valuable in human life is that we are,
by the grace of Jesus Christ,
beloved friends of God
flourishing in the service of others
in the power of the Holy Spirit.

These are the key elements in that relationship.

God

Everything begins, proceeds, and ends with the God
who nourishes our flourishing in Jesus Christ
through the work of the Holy Spirit

Redemption

In the salvation offered to humans in Jesus Christ,
God frees us to see things afresh (re-deem)
with the maturity of the mind of Christ

Appreciation

The human response to this divine mercy is gratitude.
It is a deep appreciation for God's love
that encourages us to be blessings in the world.

Community

Appreciation for the redemption by which God frees us to be his friends
gives us access to the riches of belonging with the Holy Trinity,
a relationship that draws us into loving community
with the whole of creation.

Elation

In and through the dynamics of this relationship,
our spirits are raised and we experience a joy and contentment
that elicits praise and service.

The God of Jesus Christ
redeems our lives,
generating appreciation, community, and elation
through the work of the Holy Spirit.

That's the richness of the Christian faith in a word – GRACE.

This is the only source of authentic human salvation.
This is the only source of authentic human riches.
This is the only source of authentic human happiness.

Everything else we have is entrusted to us
in this gift of salvation
to be used in the service of GRACE,
to be used to glorify God and enjoy the riches of his grace forever.

The final words of the parable are powerful.
The Good News translation says “rich in God’s sight.”
The New Revised Standard Version,
along with the New International Version and many others,
says “rich toward God.”

I like that idea of being “rich toward God.”
There is this powerful sense
of our riches being offered to and for God.
That puts all of our possessions in their proper light.
They are means of joyfully serving
the God who redeemed us as friends in Jesus Christ
and who inspires us to joy and service through the Holy Spirit.

May you find new opportunities this week
to learn and live the riches of God’s GRACE.

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