

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 13
Year C

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14, 2:18-23
Psalm 49:1-11
Colossians 3:1-11
Luke 12:13-21

“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” This could be the theme song of the parable Jesus tells in our Gospel reading. In response to a request for Him to intercede in a family inheritance dispute, Jesus tells a story. While the story may not seem to be relevant to the family problem, it really hits at the heart of it - namely, greed. A paraphrase might be, “I want everything coming to me and more, if possible.”

Too often in life, we meet people like the rich man in the story. They are so wrapped up in their own success they don't see anything around them. Their focus is only on their own affairs. This is very apparent in the use of first person singular pronouns by the rich man. He is only concerned about bringing in the abundant crop and finding a place to store it all. There is no thought of selling some of it or giving it to those who might be in need. He is only concerned about himself.

It must be stated here that wanting to find adequate storage for an abundant crop is not inherently wrong. We only need to look at the story of Joseph in Egypt to see a good example of why we might want to store up the excess. But, wise planning for the future needs of the country does not seem to be a motivating factor for this man. He is looking for a fat, easy retirement. He has no concern for others. Nor does he express any thankfulness to God for the abundance of his good fortune. And, God has the last say.

What might be the meaning of the expression, “rich toward God”? Jesus ends His story here with no explanation. What might He mean?

If we look back over the previous chapters in this gospel, we might get some hints. The Good Samaritan used his resources to aid the man who fell among robbers. We see Mary sitting, listening to the words of Jesus. This expression also includes trusting God for our needs as shown by the Lord's Prayer. And, as we will see in next week's Gospel reading, selling our possessions and giving to the poor.

In God's economy, it is not the size of our bank account that matters. While there is nothing wrong with having adequate resources for our retirement years, if that is our total focus, we are missing God's commandment to love one another. The trap is when excess becomes the center of our life. Then, money becomes our idol and we face the fate of the rich man in the story. Jesus is warning those in His audience, and us today, to always focus on God and trust God to supply our needs.