

Be Rich Toward God

Text: Hosea 11:1-11

Colossians 3:1-11 (Series C. 8th Sunday after Pentecost) 107: 1-9, 43

Luke 12:16-21

.....God said to him, "You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself?" And Jesus concluded, "This is how it is with those who pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in God's sight....."

Let us pray:

I shared this observation some years ago, I believe it worth repeating it. I saw a man walking two greyhound dogs – one leash in each hand just around the corner of Grand Boulevard and NDG. I thought to myself *"Of all the animals there are in this world, greyhounds are animals that are to be pitied the most."*

I'm not referring to their funny shape, the lean look of the greyhounds always gives the impression that they need a good feed. When I say that the greyhound is to be pitied the most, this is because of the races they are involved in. They chase something they can never catch.

Unlike most other dogs, when they chase a cat or a rabbit, they have a good chance of catching it, but the greyhound never has the chance of catching what he chases. I don't know what the *"rabbit"* is made of, but it's not real.

It doesn't have legs like a real rabbit but scoots around the track on a rail. If by some chance the greyhound did catch up with that rabbit, he would be sadly disappointed – it's only a fake.

And you know what? Those greyhounds don't learn. The next time they see that thing fly past them, what do they do? They chase after it. When the greyhounds see that fake rabbit fly past them all common sense goes out the window. Maybe they will catch it this time..... they think!! Those greyhounds chasing after their false rabbits are a commentary on life.

We spend a lot of time chasing after things that we think are valuable at the time but when seen in the bigger picture, they are just *"fake rabbits"*. This leads us to the story Jesus tells of a man who had done very well for himself. Indeed, he had been truly blessed by God.

He had become very rich and owned some of the best land in the community. And he used that land wisely. He employed very successful farming practices and it paid off with a bumper crop.

The question now arises, "How should I manage this unusually large harvest? What should I do? I have no place to store my crops. I know what I will do? He said confidently to himself I will pull down my old storage and build bigger ones. This underlines the size of the harvest.

He hasn't just done well; he has done *very, very* well indeed. We are impressed. But then something goes wrong. Our fine impressions of this successful farmer vanish when we discover that he has no intention of sharing this miraculous gift. He has stored his harvest all *for himself*.

His own words condemn him: *Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat drink, and enjoy yourself!*

Notice what's happening here. He's not unlike most of us in his passions and motives. The message of the parable is not about God disliking rich people who work hard and are successful.

This isn't a story about wicked man. We don't hear of him mistreating his workers, or dishonest or unjust. He is just an ordinary man who is careful, conservative and has been blessed by good rains, and good soil. But he gets everything out of focus.

He lost sight of the fact that his farm was an *asset* given by God and that his good crops were *gifts* from God. His richness had become the sole focus and center of his life. This story is an example how we including me, like the farmer, think we have got everything right when in actual fact, we have got it all wrong.

It doesn't matter if we are *successful and rich, struggling and poor*, it is one of the facts of life that we can so easily forget what are the most important things in life. No sooner had the farmer finished congratulating himself, we hear the voice of God. "*You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself?*"

The rich man thought he had done everything right and could now sit back and enjoy his wealth but he had forgotten the most important thing of all – he had forgotten God.

Jesus concluded his story saying, "*Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God*" (Luke 12:21). The farmer had got it all wrong. Of what good was all his wealth after his death?

Like the greyhounds – they too have got it all wrong. They think that the fake rabbit is worth chasing, but in spite of all their effort it gets them nowhere. We too are in danger of putting so much effort into the wrong things. Jesus says in Luke, "*And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose or forfeit your own soul in the process*" (verse 9:25).

As the saying goes, "*You can't take it with you*" though heaven knows how hard we try. What we *do* take with us is the baggage of foolish neglect or even doubt toward God in our daily living.

Those of us privileged enough to have options to build our *barns* and store up earthly materials, often shield ourselves and deny the ticking clock. *After all it is not what we take along when we leave this world behind, rather what we leave behind when we go.*

Check out a local estate sale and see a lifetime of collections, clothing, furniture, and just plain stuff that's left behind, offered at a bargain to be collected by others and then left again. Meanwhile all around us others cry out for basic treasures such as clean water, food, clothes, shelter, and health care.

We watch the daily news and we see the after-effects of hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, catastrophic floods, and deadly wild fires just to see how one can measure the loss of possessions against the loss of life.

And don't avoid your eyes and ears to the cries of those, already desperate, suddenly caught indefinitely in horrifyingly cruel conditions most of us cannot even imagine – babies and children separated from parents, spouses separated from each other – in dreadfully dangerous war-torn areas and along the borders of our "*civilized country*" as we in this land like to think of ourselves.

The most impressive home is not permanent storage, nor is it even the grave – think about Egyptian tombs! No matter how privileged or how honored in this mortal life, no one will live forever and we take nothing along.

How are we prepared *this very day* for the next? *And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?* This life is meant to be less about *downsizing* than *upsizing* - start storing up spiritual treasures by turning toward God.

This story of Jesus is a very modern one. Just substitute the crops and storage with the things we strive for, and we stand right in the middle of this parable. We constantly face the threat of our material goods, and our striving for them taking over our lives.

We can be so easily consumed by all this striving to improve our lot in life. In 2,000 years things haven't changed that much. The tension in the story of Jesus is the tension in our lives. We can ignore the tension this parable creates within us and gloss over it, explain it away, or philosophize, or intellectualize the text by saying, "*Things aren't that bad?*"

Jesus confronts us and forces us to look within ourselves at the values and beliefs with which we operate. He wants us to recognize that we too are prone in chasing "*fake rabbits*". In the end Jesus said, get our priorities right. The rich fool died and his riches didn't help him one bit.

We need to be "*rich in God's sight*" (v 21). What did Jesus mean when he said that we are to be *rich in God's sight*? Our greatest need by far is a *personal relationship* with Jesus Christ as Lord, I believe.

There are many who know *about* Jesus, something about his life, what happened to him, but they don't have a personal relationship with him - *to trust him, love him, rely on him, believe him, turn to him, talk to him, listen to him, have faith in him, worship him here at church, regard him as someone close and personal.*

Having a Saviour who loves us, forgives us, walks with us through the ups and downs of life's journey, has brought us into his family and promised to all who trust him that they have a place in heaven. *That is to be truly rich, to have assets that will not taking away*

It is Jesus who even forgives us when we get all of priorities mixed up. He keeps on loving us any way even when we look for number one. He even forgives us when we are so busy making a living and forget that he is the source of all that we have.

All the other things will fade away and will be of no use to us beyond the grave, but the love and salvation of Jesus will endure into eternity. *After all it is not what we take along when we leave this world behind, rather what we leave behind when we go.*

Be filled with *kindness, selflessness, benevolence, love.* In taking on a *new self*, as Paul tells us, we are *no longer Greek and Jew, white and black, brown and yellow, citizen and immigrant, one political party and another. Christ is all and in all.*

Life is *short* and no amount of stuff will make it last longer; what we do with what we have is what matters. *Whoever is wise will ponder these things...Set your minds on things that are above...* How are you storing your treasure?

The best inheritance you can leave your children is *faith* in Jesus Christ, I believe this with all my heart. The best *asset* you can have for this life and beyond is *faith* and *trust* in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. Every thing else is a fake rabbit.

**Thank God today for the riches that have come
to us through Jesus your Saviour.**

Amen.