

The passage that we heard this morning, from the Gospel of Luke, is one of those scripture passages that always makes me laugh – because of that part where the rich farmer says “And I will say to my soul – soul, you have ample goods.” I don’t know if the original Greek was meant to be funny, but to me, it sounds hilarious, like something Groucho Marx would say – referring to your own soul as “Soul.” Maybe Jesus was trying to be funny. I’d like to think he was. I think God has a great sense of humor.

But – the passage starts out in all seriousness with someone in the crowd giving Jesus an order. The person says: “Tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” And Jesus, as the incarnation of God, does what God does over and over throughout scripture. He basically says “I’m not that kind of a God!” Jesus didn’t come to earth to resolve financial disputes between relatives. He’s not a circuit court judge or a government official. He’s not a Sanhedrin lawyer. He is not concerned with the trivial financial affairs of humankind.

He warns the person: “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” And then he tells them the parable of the rich farmer, who stored up ample goods for himself but was not rich towards God.

But surely Jesus, the embodiment of love and compassion, would understand that we humans have a deep need for security. We all want to store up for ourselves those things which make us feel safe. We want to build protection from the harshness of the world and from impoverishment – that specter that is always looming outside our door.

Of course God understands our fears and knows where they come from. What God is saying here is that yes, we all want safety and security but no – riches and possessions are not the way to achieve those things. The more you have, the more you need. The more you accumulate, the more you fear losing it. The more you acquire, the more insecure you feel.

“One’s life,” Jesus says here, “Does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” God says to the rich farmer “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” The rich farmer dies at the end of this parable, and God tells him he is a fool.

That sounds pretty harsh, doesn’t it, but Jesus does not leave us comfortless. He tells us the good news – and the good news is that if we put our time, and our energy, and our focus into our relationship with God – if we are “rich toward God.” – then there we will find safety and security. There is the payoff – ten thousand times more than the payoff of money and possessions. When we are rich towards God – when we work towards closeness and harmony with our Savior, we find heavenly riches.

Today’s Epistle to the Colossians says, “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” It speaks of our lives without God as being dead, empty, meaningless, and then our resurrection in Christ where we will be “revealed with him in glory.” How many of us have felt dead from exhaustion, working so hard, maintaining what we have, and yearning to acquire more. How many of us put our energy and our time, our life force into earthly things that will soon pass away, and it doesn’t make us feel better?

God doesn’t want us to abandon our own survival and our own happiness. Instead, God wants us to seek true happiness – to invest in things eternal. In Jesus’ command for us to love one another as he loved us, we are also reminded that being rich with God includes the forming of true and loving connections with our fellow human beings. Being rich with God includes loving our neighbor. It is easy to spend most of our time working, while ignoring the needs of our loved ones, and the needs of the vulnerable and the marginalized. Time spent on these relationships, though, and on our relationship with our creator, is never wasted. It is instead the best and most holy use of our time.

There is a wonderful collect in the Book of Common Prayer that sometimes brings tears to my eyes. It’s the collect for guidance:

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The part that brings a tear to my eye is “we may not forget you.” The God who loves us always calls us to draw closer, to never forget that love. That love is our safety and our security.

There is our heavenly treasure. AMEN