

Luke 12:13-21

In warning against greed, Jesus tells a parable of a wealthy man who feels secure because of his great riches, but whose wealth becomes meaningless when he dies. Christ challenges us to seek a rich relationship with God instead of material riches. Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" 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." Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' 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. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' 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?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God."

Jesus is approached by "someone in the crowd" embroiled in a family feud over an inheritance and needs a religious authority like Jesus to render a judgment against his brother. Jesus has been encouraging his followers to be fearless and faithful in preaching the Kingdom of God (the Big Picture), and along comes this man whining about a problem that sounds petty in comparison. Rather than giving the kind of judgment provided by many religious texts (Deuteronomy, for example), Jesus recognizes a teaching moment and gives the man, and the crowd (including us), a warning: "Beware! Watch out! Be on guard against greed! For one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (v. 15). Jesus knew that material things, no matter how fun and comforting, lovely and useful they may be, will never completely satisfy our deepest longings. We will always want more. Material goods make very poor gods for us to worship: this truth is at the core of our relationship with God. Just as the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures had to call the people back repeatedly from worshipping "other gods" than the God of Israel, so Jesus (and Paul, the passionate apostle who followed him), preached a gospel of spiritual values centered on the one true God, not the many, petty, fragile little 'gods' that grab our attention and too often capture our hearts.

The gap between the haves and the have-nots, in Jesus' time and now, is a sign of human fallenness and greed, because God has provided more than enough for all of us, all God's children, if we were just and fair in our living. The reign of God isn't marked by inequity and need as a result of competitive accumulation; instead, it's experienced in the abundance of God's generosity and justice.

(Kathryn Matthews, Sermon Seeds, UCC)

COCU50C Readings

Where do you place your faith? Does the idea of trusting God for protection, provision and justice sound naive and unrealistic to you? Yet, this is exactly what the Scriptures call us to do – to live differently from the self-protective, wealth accumulating, customs of our world, and place our trust in God. In the face of the huge challenges we face in the world this may sound completely out of touch, but, when the role of money in so many of those challenges is recognised, the call to give up our faith in finance and reclaim a true, child-like faith in God becomes disturbingly relevant and subversive.

This week's readings contrast a life of dependence on wealth with the life of dependence on God. The readings warn against greed and speak about the danger of making wealth our goal and our security. In Hosea and in Psalm 107, God's salvation and care is promised, even when God's people have needed to be disciplined and corrected. When it comes to making our way in the world, the quest for money too easily becomes an end in itself, and will ultimately lead us into destruction, and to bringing suffering on ourselves and others. However, when life is found in our relationship with God, and in basing our lives on the values of God's reign, we bring life and joy to ourselves and others, and our lives have eternal value. Ultimately, we all need to choose the priorities by which we will live.

So much of the suffering and injustice in our world can be traced to the quest for money and to the greed of certain individuals or groups. The ongoing pain from the global economic crisis, the ecological challenges posed by our dependence on fossil fuels, the war and violence which arises between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' (so often justified as a "protection of interests"), the debates around health care, refugees and climate change – all have strong, albeit often hidden, financial agendas intertwined within the other issues. The challenge is to recognise the powerful, and often destructive, role that money plays in global affairs, and to challenge our world leaders, our business leaders and ourselves to embrace a financial ethic of sharing and giving, over accumulating and 'protecting'. Ultimately, in a world where economic performance is measured quarterly, it will be difficult to begin to embrace an eternal view of wealth, but if the voices of Christ-followers remain silent on this difficult, prophetic, Gospel call, all hope of a more just and equitable world is lost. In what ways can you make your voice heard a little more clearly? *(John van de Laar, Sacredise)*

Psalm 107:1-9, 43

Praise for God's unfailing love, and God's salvation of God's people when in distress. The history of God's people reveals God's faithful love.

O give thanks to God, for God is good;

for God's steadfast love endures forever.

Let the redeemed of God say so, those whom God redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and the west, from the north and the south.

Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.

Then they cried to God in their trouble, and God delivered them from their distress; God led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town.

Let them thank God for God's steadfast love, for God's wonderful works to humankind.

For God satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry God fills with good things.

Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and consider the steadfast love of God.

Hosea 11:1-11

Judgement is prophesied for Israel because of the people's idolatry and unfaithfulness, but God's compassion and love for God's people makes judgement difficult for God, and so restoration is also promised.

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols.

Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them.

I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love.

I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks.

I bent down to them and fed them.

They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me.

The sword rages in their cities, it consumes their oracle-priests, and devours because of their schemes.

My people are bent on turning away from me.

To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all.

How can I give you up, Ephraim?

How can I hand you over, O Israel?

How can I make you like Admah?

How can I treat you like Zeboiim?

My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.

I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim;

for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst,

and I will not come in wrath.

They shall go after the Lord, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west.

They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,

and like doves from the land of Assyria;

and I will return them to their homes, says the Lord.

Colossians 3:1-11

Because of Christ's life in us, we are called to prioritise the values of heaven over the values of earth, and to avoid the greed and lust that of "earth-bound" existence.

Rather, recognising that we are all the same in Christ, we are to find our life in Christ, and seek to become like our God.

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 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. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.

In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!