

Much of my family is here this morning, which means that it is a great time to talk family inheritance (right, Mom?!).

Along with sex and politics, the topic of money is always exciting-- especially in church. When sex, politics, and money are all interwoven-- even better.

Thank you, lectionary!

Let's begin with the Luke text.

The fuller context involves the joys of family inheritance.

It would surprise no one that someone was trying to triangulate Jesus into a family dispute over money.

"Tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

Or, more directly, "Make him give me some money."

Verse 15 is the key in this parable: as Jesus reminds us that one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

In church history classes, especially when discussing the great sin of slavery, my father would talk about our "thingification" of life.

Thingification.

--Turning gifts from God into commodities.

--Turning human beings into objects that can be bought and sold like pieces of meat.

--Turning the very pursuit of happiness and joy into a pursuit of accumulation and acquisition.

Thingification.

In the parable the man had so much grain and so many goods that he needed to tear down existing barns so as to build bigger and better ones.

He was so self-absorbed that he talked to himself like Snow White-- mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the biggest, baddest of them all.

When we thingify life, we disconnect ourselves from the wider spiritual eco-system.

God has created us to be in relationship;

--To be interconnected;

--To be interdependent;

--To be in communion.

When divorced from these relationships, we are divorcing ourselves from the very gospel narrative-- turning God's amazing act of selflessness into selfish gain.

--Instead of sharing the gifts, he hoarded them.

--Instead of recognizing God's role in the abundance, he worshiped himself.

--Instead of building community, he divided it and diced it up.

That is what greed does:

It destroys and distorts.

It commodifies and thingifies.

It isolates and polarizes.

It pulls us away from healthy dependency upon God and neighbor.

It fuels a lust for those things that will never be able to satisfy our deeper hungers.

It fans the flames of fear and affluence; of worry and suspicion; of resentment and bitterness.

In other words, greed-- which our Colossians text calls idolatry-- greed leads to death.

Which, is what made this man a fool.

He thought that he had everything, but in reality he had nothing.

What a fool.

As we move to the Colossians text, we'll notice that this foolishness is not isolated to greed.

This list is long:

Fornication. Impurity. Passion. Evil Desire. Anger. Wrath. Malice. Slander. Abusive Language. Deceit.

To use the language of the letter itself, we are put to death these earthly practices-- we are to strip them off, like we would stained laundry.

Such practices bring further death.

-They separate us from God and neighbor.

-They divide and devastate the wider community.

We are different the letter boldly declares.

Baptized into Christ's death, we have also died to those things that bring death.

We don't have to wear stained, soiled garments, for in that same baptism, we have also been clothed with the truth of the resurrection.

As such:

Life, not death, is our future.

Grace, not greed, controls this moment.

Salvation, not sin, defines our identity.

Which is why verse 11 is so important (and so subversive).

We are told that in Christ, we are no longer primarily defined as Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free.

That our net-worth isn't tallied by the size of our wallet.

That our allegiances aren't defined by any particular political party.

That our identity itself isn't something measured in Facebook likes or something that can be described in 140 characters or less.

In Christ, we are a new creation-- as such, we are part of something so much bigger and more beautiful than what can be contained in barns or bank accounts.

You can only imagine how threatening this message really was to the Roman Empire.

This was an empire that ruled through fear and intimidation.

One that used the sword and quickly repressed dissent.

One that subjugated and suppressed the people while creating a truly hierarchical model for life.

Those with the biggest swords wore the crown.

Those with the greatest abundance controlled the power.

Those who used guile, cunning, and ruthlessness rose in prestige.

Fornication. Impurity. Evil Desires. Anger. Wrath. Malice.

Deceit... these all fit really well in this type of worldview where might makes right and living for one's self is the chief goal....

Bigger barns.

Fatter wallets.
More mirrors.
More self-worship.
More self-everything.

Which, in looking at the list starting in verse 12, is exactly the opposite of what we've been called to be and do as the church...

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience.

Bear with one another, and when you have conflict, forgive each other.

When you have conflict.

This isn't some utopian list -- practices impossible to imagine-- even more impossible to do.

No, this is how we are to live faithfully into our baptism;

-- faithfully as agents of reconciliation and repairers of the breach;

-- faithfully as a public witness and living body of Christ in the here and now.

Please notice that these practices listed here all cultivate community and animate life.

-- they are all about healing and restoring relationships;

-- they all speak to a faithful posture before God and neighbor.

I've never been part of a healthy relationship that was void of patience and humility;

I've never known a truly great culture barren of kindness and compassion;

I've never known someone's faith to thrive outside of practiced patterns of forgiveness;

Such practices speak to our interrelated connectedness;

-- to our being engrafted into the wider body of Christ;

-- to our shared work of being human.

Compassion; Kindness; Humility; Meekness; Bearing with another; Forgiving one another.

When looking at the marvelous flowers in front of our sanctuary that were given in memory of Mary and Dan Ruffner, it is impossible not to see these two departed saints through the lens of such practices.

Dan's playfulness and humility.

Mary's compassion and kindness.

Their ability to gather children and adult alike-- to make us all feel special-- like we belong-- like we truly matter.

Theirs was a beauty of life that they shared through food and flowers, through laughter and teaching our children the very story of God's beauty in Christ.

They shepherded us;

They spoiled us;

They loved us;

Which points to verse 14 where we're told to wear the garment of love (agape).

This is very similar to I Corinthians 12-- agape love being at the center of our life and faithfulness because it is this very sacrificial love, and this love alone, that binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Do you hear the difference?

When we thingify and commodify life, we separate it from its source and meaning.

When sex, politics, and money become divorced from their wider purposes, we turn them into empty acts of selfishness.

When we view life as a rat race or as something merely meant to maximize our personal pleasure, we become no better than animals.

Love, and love alone, is what binds everything together in perfect harmony. Binds everything together...

--Our Inter-dependent lives.

--Our Inter-related futures.

--Our communion with God and with others.

Love, and only sacrificial love, is what binds everything together in perfect harmony.

-Not walls of separation. This doesn't create perfect harmony.

-Not economics based on greed. This won't build community.

-Not politics fueled by fear. This cannot bring greater joy.

-Not power through coercion. This cannot cultivate life.

-Not glory through self-glorification. This doesn't celebrate gospel.

Love that is based in and for Christ gathers and heals.

Love that is grounded in and with Christ reconciles and restores.

Love that is modeled in Christ sacrifices and serves.

Love that is faithful to the cross of our savior, Jesus Christ, focuses upon sharing the gifts of life, beauty, and abundance with all-- just as our savior shared it all with us.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

To God alone be the glory.

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Second Reformed Church