

SUNDAY, JULY 31, 2022

LUKE 12:13-21

TRADITIONAL

IN TODAY'S GOSPEL TEXT, JESUS IS IN THE MIDDLE OF A LONG JOURNEY FROM NAZARETH TO JERUSALEM. AND WHILE THE TRIP NORMALLY TAKES ABOUT THREE DAYS TO WALK, IN THE GOSPEL LUKE SPENDS ALMOST TEN CHAPTERS GETTING JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES FROM POINT A TO POINT B, AS THEY WORK THEIR WAY TO THE PLACE WHERE JESUS WILL UNTIMATELY BE CRUCIFIED.

WHAT TAKES SO LONG IS THAT JESUS HAS BEEN STOPPING ALONG THE WAY TO TEACH HIS DISCIPLES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD. BECAUSE THE LOCALS GATHER TO HEAR WHAT JESUS HAS TO SAY, MANY OF HIS TEACHINGS HAVE TAKEN THE FORM OF PARABLES – THOSE SHORT STORIES ABOUT COMMON THINGS THAT CUT RIGHT TO THE HEART OF WHAT JESUS WANTS HIS DISCIPLES TO LEARN.

OVER AND OVER, THROUGHOUT THE GOSPEL OF LUKE, JESUS TELLS PARABLES TO POINT OUT THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT WHAT WE MIGHT EXPECT.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD FLIPS OUR UNDERSTANDING OF POWER UPSIDE DOWN AND OUR VALUES RIGHT SIDE UP.

SO HERE IS JESUS IN THE MIDDLE OF HIS TEACHING WHEN HE IS INTERRUPTED BY SOMEONE WHO HAS APPARENTLY NOT EVEN LISTENING TO WHAT JESUS HAS BEEN SAYING AS HE INSTRUCTS HIS DISCIPLES TO BE FAITHFUL IN SITUATIONS OF PERSECUTION. AND NOT ONLY DOES HE INTERRUPT JESUS, HE DEMANDS ASSISTANCE.

HOW RUDE, RIGHT?

TO BE FAIR, IT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN UNUSUAL FOR SOMEONE WHO NEEDED TO RESOLVE A LEGAL MATTER TO APPEAL TO THE LOCAL RABBIO FOR HELP. LAW AND RELIGION WERE SO CLOSELY INTERTWINED, THAT THERE WAS BARELY ANY DISTINCTION BETWEEN A JUDGE AND A TEACHER. IF THIS WAS A YOUNG MAN WHOSE OLDER BROTHER HAD REFUSED TO SHARE THE FATHER'S INHERITANCE, HE MIGHT HAVE SEEN JESUS AS ONE WHO WOULD HAVE THE LEGAL AUTHORITY TO RESOLVE THE DISPUTE.

ON THE OTHER HAND, IT MAY BE THAT THIS YOUNG MAN WAS BEHAVING SELFISHLY, REBELLING AGAINST AN OLDER BROTHER WHO WAS TRYING TO KEEP THE FAMILY TOGETHER BY NOT DISPERSING THE PROPERTY. WE SIMPLY DON'T KNOW. WHAT WE DO KNOW IS THAT JESUS SAW STRAIGHT INTO THIS MAN'S HEART AND KNEW IMMEDIATELY THAT THE MAN'S LEGAL CONCERN WAS NOT THE REAL PROBLEM. THE REAL PROBLEM WAS GREED.

SO IMAGINE THE YOUNG MAN'S SURPRISE WHEN JESUS REFUSED TO HELP HIM AS HE THOUGHT HE WOULD. WASN'T JESUS THE ONE WHO WORKED MIRACLES EVERYWHERE HE WENT? IF HE COULD DO THOSE MARVELOUS THINGS, COULDN'T HE USE HIS AUTHORITY TO MAKE THE OLDER BROTHER DO WHAT THE LAW SAID HE SHOULD DO WITH THEIR FATHER'S PROPERTY? AND WHAT DID ALL THIS TALK ABOUT GREED HAVE TO DO WITH FAIRNESS? INSTEAD OF HELPING, JESUS WAS GIVING THIS YOUNG MAN A CHANCE TO CHANGE HIS HEART.

SEE, THE MISUSE OF WEALTH WAS ACTUALLY A MAJOR TOPIC OF DISCUSSION IN JESUS'S DAY, AND ALMOST EVERY CHAPTER OF LUKE HAS SOME REFERENCE TO MONEY AND MATERIAL RESOURCES. THE COMMANDMENT ABOUT COVETING WAS VERY FAMILIAR TO EVERYONE. GREED IS NOTHING MORE THAN A DESIRE TO HAVE MORE THAN WE ACTUALLY HAVE, AND JESUS USED THIS MAN'S INTERRUPTION TO EXPLAIN WHY GREED HAS NO PLACE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD, BECAUSE THE WAYS OF GOD ARE NOTHING LIKE OUR WAYS.

LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT WHERE THE SURPRISE CAME FOR THESE PEOPLE WHO HEARD THIS FAMILIAR TO US PARABLE FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME.

THERE WAS THIS RICH FARMER WHO HAD A REALLY GOOD YEAR – WITHOUT ANY MORE LABOR THAN HE USUALLY PUT INTO HIS FARM, THE LAND HAD PRODUCED SUCH A BUMPER CROP THAT THE HARVEST WAS GOING TO BE AMAZING. IN FIRST CENTURY PALESTINE, THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN EVIDENCE OF GOD'S BLESSING ON A GOOD MAN. GOOD FORTUNE MEANT YOU'D BEEN DOING WHAT YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO DO, AND GOD WAS SMILING DOWN ON YOU WITH HIS BLESSING.

THE FARMER WONDERS TO HIMSELF WHAT HE SHOULD DO WITH ALL THIS GOOD FORTUNE. PEOPLE WHO TALK TO THEMSELVES IN PARABLES ARE USUALLY THE BAD GUY – BUT THIS MUST SURELY BE A GOOD GUY, RIGHT? LOOK AT THE ABUNDANCE OF BLESSING HE HAS RECEIVED THROUGH HIS CROPS. SO THE CROWD LEANS IN TO JESUS MORE CLOSELY, WONDERING WHICH WAY THE PINCH LINE IS GOING TO FALL.

THE FARMER DECIDES TO PULL DOWN HIS BARNES AND BUILD BIGGER ONES TO STORE ALL HIS WEALTH, THEN HE CAN RELAX, EAT DRINK AND BE MERRY. THIS JUST DOESN'T MAKE SENSE AND THE LISTENERS KNOW IT. YOU DON'T TEAR DOWN YOUR BARNES RIGHT BEFORE HARVEST! AND WHY IS HE STORING HIS WEALTH? IS HE PLANNING TO HOARD IT ALL FOR HIMSELF?

AND HERE IS THE PUNCH LINE "YOU FOOL" ( THIS IS VERY UNUSUAL FIRST OF ALL FOR GOD TO BE A CHARACTER IN THE PARABLES)"THIS VERY NIGHT YOUR LIFE IS REQUIRED OF YOU. SO NOW WHO IS GOING TO GET ALL THAT WEALTH YOU'VE ACCUMULATED?" INTERESTING – DEATH HADN'T BEEN PART OF THE PICTURE UNTIL NOW, AND IF THE CROWD WERE HONEST, NEITHER HAD GOD.

AND THAT MY FRIENDS IS THE POINT – THE REAL REASON THIS PARABLE IS CALLED THE RICH FOOL. JESUS ISN'T SAYING THERE IS ANYTHING WRONG WITH WEALTH – INSTEAD OF FOOLISHLY FOCUSING YOUR EFFORT ON GETTING RICH FOR YOURSELF, BE RICH TOWARD GOD.

BEING RICH TOWARD GOD MEANS PLACING VALUE ON THE SAME THINGS GOD VALUES. IT MEANS LOVING THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF AS WE ARE TOLD IN MARK 12:30-31. IT MEANS LOVING MERCY, ACTING JUSTLY, AND WALKING HUMBLLY WITH YOUR GOD AS WE'RE TOLD IN MICAH 6:8.

IT ALSO MEANS ENJOYING A RICH SPIRITUAL LIFE OF PRAYER, BIBLE STUDY AND FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHER BELIEVERS AS WE SEEK TO FOLLOW JESUS AND LEARN FROM HIM TOGETHER. IT MEANS BEING HONEST WITH OURSELVES ABOUT OUR OWN HOARDING OF GOD'S RICHES, THE TALENTS AND GIFTS HE HAS GIVEN TO EACH ONE OF US TO USE FOR HIS GLORY. IT MEANS LIVING LIVES OF FORGIVENESS – ASKING FOR IT WHEN WE HAVE DONE WRONG, AND OFFERING IT WHEN SOMEONE HAS WRONGED US. IT MEANS TRUSTING THAT GOD WILL PROVIDE FOR OUR NEEDS AND THAT INSTEAD OF RELYING ON OUR OWN SELF-SUFFICIENCE, WE RELY ON HIM.

ON CNN THIS PAST TUESDAY, IT WAS REPORTED THAT A BROOKLYN PASTOR KNOWN FOR HIS FLASHY DESIGNER OUTFITS AND EXTRAVAGANT JEWELRY AND HIS WIFE WERE ROBBED OF MORE THAN ONE MILLION DOLLARS WHILE HE WAS PREACHING TO HIS CONGREGATION LAST

SUNDAY. APPARENTLY THREE PEOPLE ENTERED THE SANCTUARY WITH FIREARMS AND REMOVED THE JEWELRY OF PASTOR LAMOR WHITEHEAD AND HIS WIFE. THEY TOOK HIS BISHOP'D RING, THEIR WEDDING BANDS, GOLD AND JEWEL ENCRUSTED CHAINS, VERY EXPENSIVE WATCHES AND MORE. HE IS QUOTED AS SAYING, "IT'S NOT ABOUT ME BEING FLASHY. IT'S ABOUT ME PURCHASING WHAT I WANT TO PURCHASE. IT'S MY PREROGATIVE. IF I WORKED HARD FOR IT, I CAN PURCHASE WHATEVER I WANT."

SOUNDS AN AWFUL LOT LIKE THE RICH FOOL, DOESN'T IT, AS HE SAYS TO HIS SOUL, "SOUL, YOU HAVE AMPLE GOODS LAID UP FOR YEARS. YOU CAN RELAX, EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY."

SEE, NOWHERE IN SCRIPTURE DOES GOD PROMISE A CHRISTIAN EARTHLY RICHES, OR GIVE ENCOURAGEMENT TO SEEK THEM, PRAY FOR THEM, OR REVEL IN THEM. YET IN 1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19 WE ARE SHOWN HOW BEING RICH TOWARD GOD IS POSSIBLE EVEN FOR THOSE LIKES OF BISHOP LAMOR WHITEHEAD. ST PAUL SAYS, "COMMAND THOSE WHO ARE RICH IN THIS PRESENT AGE NOT TO BE HAUGHTY, NOR TO TRUST IN UNCERTAIN RICHES, BUT IN THE LIVING GOD, WHO GIVES US RICHLY ALL THINGS TO ENJOY. LET THEM DO GOOD, THAT THEY BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS, READY TO GIVE, WILLING TO SHARE, STORING UP FOR THEMSELVES A GOOD FOUNDATION FOR THE TIME TO COME, THAT THEY MAY LAY HOLD ON ETERNAL LIFE.

BEING RICH IN GOD MEANS HAVING A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM AND BEING A BLESSING TO OTHERS. IT MEANS LIVING HERE ON EARTH AND LAYING UP TREASURES IN HEAVEN, SO THAT WE MAY ENTER THE JOY OF GOD IN THE KINGDOM TO COME. IN THE NAME OF JESUS. AMEN.