

Sunday, August 1, 2010 – The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost Luke 12:13-21

Salvation – Relationship or Reward

Jesus told a parable about a wealthy man whose lands produced a bumper crop and so he tore down his old storage barns in order to build new ones in order to store the harvest. Sounds like a pretty prudent man in an area where weather can be fickle and building material is more valuable than labor. This parable is not a condemnation of wealth. Society needs talented, creative people and they need to be compensated for their abilities. Theophilus, for whom Luke-Acts was written, was probably a very wealthy supporter of the early church. The parable reflects on the man's response to his good fortune. He finally felt secure in his abundance. He could now relax and enjoy life. I do not feel that Jesus' response to the man was a condemnation of his choices; rather, it is a statement of sorrow. Jesus cared about the man. He could have had so much more in life. Self centered behavior is a very serious limiting factor in life. It is a self initiated quest for security and acceptance by others, but it limits our growth as human beings. To grow we have to move beyond ourselves.

Little has changes since the time of Jesus. Why is advertising so effective? Why is weight gain our number one health problem? Why have storage units been one of the fastest growing businesses? Why have consumer products grown to 75% of our economy and why do clothes never wear out, but are simply given away? Why do we always need the "latest" and "greatest"? We need to be accepted and feel secure. I would argue that it is our most basic need. We have struggled a long, long time for our survival as a species. Humans need a long period of dependent care than any other animal to reach maturity. Where do we find our sense of security and acceptance? We have been told repeatedly that it is to be found in our accumulated "stuff". This "stuff" provides both our protection and status. The more we have, the better we are. The rich man of the parable looked to the produce stored in his barns to provide the security necessary for him to enjoy life. Jesus said that there is a better way. "So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves, and are not rich toward God." Luke 12:21. What does Jesus mean by "rich toward God"? A few verses later in Luke Jesus, "Instead, strive for God's kingdom, and all these things will be given to you as well." Luke 12:31.

Jesus made it very clear that the Kingdom of God is not some future time or place. This is God's creation, all of it. God created the whole of the universe, the heavens, the earth and everything that is beyond. Jesus made it very clear throughout his ministry that God's kingdom is right here and right now. To be "rich toward God" is to acknowledge the presence of God within our lives right here and now. We are a part of the whole of God's creation. God cares about us very deeply. We are loved valued and accepted by God not on the basis of anything we do, say or believe, but only on the basis of God' life giving act of love. Here we find our acceptance and security. All that we have to do is to be open, to trust in the love of God. Our salvation, that which gives

life, is a relationship with God that transcends the limits of time and place. Our acceptance and security lies not in all of the “stuff” that surrounds us, but is the love and way of God. Then we are free to participate in, to experience the wonder and joy of all of God’s creation that surrounds us. The life around us is no longer a threat to our security, but a wonderful adventure to be experienced. Every person, every place becomes a new opportunity to grow in understanding. Our relationship with God is not a denial of our present life, but an expansion of the possibilities of life’s experiences and personal growth.

It is unfortunate that Christianity has not always been open to the fullness of God’s creation. Once Christian theology began to embrace the Greek and Jewish apocalyptic thought that God’s presence had abandoned this world and was to be found sitting on its throne in heaven, Christians became much more focused on another time and place. Salvation became getting through this life so that we could begin to enjoy life in the next world. Salvation became a reward for the right behaviors or beliefs. I sometimes think that for Lutherans the entrance to heaven is not the pearly gates but a large auditorium where we will take our places and be given two number two pencils and a comprehensive test. The goal of life was in going to heaven. The purpose for this life was a preparation and testing so that we could get into heaven. There is little difference between a self centered striving to get into heaven and filling one’s barn with all the right stuff.

Salvation is not a time or a place. Salvation is not a reward for correct behavior. Salvation is living confidently in the awareness that I am loved, valued and accepted by God. A relationship is not some kind of a fuzzy feeling. It takes effort and involvement to maintain a relationship. Relationships are hard work. They are two sides working together for the mutual care and well being of both parties. Relationships begin with an acceptance and care of the other. Marriage and parenting are not easy, but they are very fulfilling when we are able to each grow in the love of the other. The same is true of our relationship with God. Because we are accepted and loved by God, we strive to live each day in harmony with the way of God. It is the way that is most fulfilling. We do not have to spend a lifetime seeking security and acceptance. When we open ourselves to God’s loving presence, the vast wonder and variety of life that God has created unfolds before us. When we are secure in God’s presence, life is no longer a threat because we begin to see in a new way. The presence of God that we experience is never limited by time and place either in this life or the wonder that lies beyond.

Once we are free of our self seeking, we can get down to the purpose of life. Creation is not a static past event. Creation is alive; it continues to unfold. There are things that happen in our world that are very destructive of life. In the face of that destruction we do not dig a hole and wait it out. We do not believe that the earth is out of God’s control and therefore we should simply wait until the next world comes along. No, we must follow Jesus’ example. Jesus enjoyed life and people where he found them and when he experienced suffering and injustice he acted to do something about it. We have been called by God to share in the ongoing work of creation. We are part of the

means that God uses to care for the people, creatures and earth itself. Relationship is beneficial to both parties. We are given life, values and supported by God. In turn we love and care for that which God cares about, the whole of creation. What an adventure lies before us.

What lies beyond this life's experience I do not know. It is in the hands of God and because of God's love for me, I am not concerned. It will be good. Right now, I have work to do. Amen.

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