

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday of Easter (Year A - 2020)
May 17th, 2020
St. Anne's, Conway SC (Online)
Morning Prayer

Leviticus 25: 1-17

James 1:2-8, 16-18

Luke 12: 13-21

If you have a Bible handy, I would encourage you to look up the Gospel passage we just heard. My guess is that some of you will have a Bible that provides headings describing certain sections, and if you do have such a Bible, then you'll probably notice that the heading for this particular reading is "The Parable of the Rich Fool." Considering that Jesus has God call the rich man a fool in the parable, that might be reason enough for the heading, but a few days ago, I had a parishioner point out that the rich man really is a fool because of what he does with his barn. As this parishioner pointed out, no farmer with any lick of sense would tear down a perfectly good barn just in order to build a bigger one. A smart farmer would simply add on. So the rich man in the parable is a fool not just because he's not willing to share what he has with those in need, but also because he wastes resources for no good reason. And I found that a valuable insight that I hope will give you a new appreciation for this parable whenever you come across it.

In any case, the parable itself opens up some pretty deep and timely questions for us. The main question I'd like us to ponder this morning is, "What is at the root of human greed?" This question is particularly timely because I'm sure that many of you have seen evidence of greed over the past few weeks, with some stockpiling comical amounts of toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and clorox. I'd venture to suggest that the root of human greed is fear. Not just fear of running out, but rather a fear of death.

And I'm convinced that our fear of death is tied in with our desire for meaning. I think that most of us want our lives to mean something. We want to leave our mark on the world because if we can do that, it grants us a sort of immortality; or a sense that we'll be remembered even long after we've died. And we dread the thought of approaching death with nothing to show for our lives. Greed enters the picture when we think that if only we can get MORE, then that will allow us to live longer or give us a better shot at leaving our mark on the world. So we spend a tremendous amount of time and energy accumulating the stuff that we think will make our lives mean something.

You might think it's a stretch to say that buying a truckload of toilet paper is related to the fear of death and the search for meaning, but I think that, deep down, some people would have to admit that they're actually thinking, "At least I won't want for that, and I can concentrate on doing something that people will remember me for. At least I won't be known as the poor sod who died without even a roll of toilet paper to his name." The problem with this way of thinking, though, is that it's ultimately only interested in self-preservation. And if you have to run roughshod over everyone else in order to secure some sense of meaning in life, well that's just too bad for others who aren't lucky enough or skilled enough or blessed enough to make their lives mean something.

But here's where Jesus upends that whole way of thinking. It's not just because he told parables about being on guard against greed. As I hope you all recall, we are in the Easter season, and we're celebrating the resurrection of Jesus and his victory over death. And it's worth remembering what Jesus triumphed over. Because I think it's too simple a thing to say that Jesus triumphed over death. Jesus triumphed over the meaninglessness of death. Think about the crucifixion. That form of capital

punishment was deliberately intended not just to kill its victims but to humiliate them. It was the Roman Empire's way of rendering their victims lives meaningless. The crucified were left with nothing. They were stripped naked and put on public display as they died. And the message was clear: if you were crucified, your life had no value except to remind others not to interfere with the power of the empire. That was the plan. And if all things had gone according to that plan, then no one would have remembered Jesus for very long. He would have been quickly forgotten - just another nobody who died without leaving a mark on the world. Just another case of someone whose life wasn't important enough to be remembered. Just another unfortunate example of the human cost of others' greed and lust for power.

But that plan was not God's plan. God's plan was to expose the lie that life can be rendered meaningless. And so the poor carpenter from Nazareth, the itinerant preacher of a message of God's love for the lowly and outcast, was raised from the dead. And his life - the life in which we all now share - is a testimony that we do not have to get caught up in the selfish and desperate search for our own life's

meaning in the face of death. We've conquered that. It has been conquered for us.

So... to get back to the message of Jesus' parable, if you think that you need 15 gallons of hand sanitizer while others go without, then be on your guard. Because your life does not consist in abundance of possessions. Your life has meaning far beyond the contents of what you have in storage. Your life's meaning is that you are loved. And that is enough.

But if you are still looking for a way to make a mark on the world, I'd invite you to consider whether the most fitting monument for your life might be in showing kindness and generosity and compassion to others. If that's the legacy you leave in the world, then no, you may not be memorialized with a bronze statue or a marble plaque. Instead, your legacy will be written on a human heart that may in turn pass along the lessons of kindness and generosity and compassion that they learned from you. That is a worthy memorial - and a barn that can never be torn down.