

“Be Rich in God’s Sight”

One might call this **“Story Sunday”** because the Gospel Lectionary Reading tells the story about a man wanting Jesus to help him get his brother to divide up the family inheritance and Jesus’ response went on to include him telling a story. Getting at Jesus’ point in telling his story and what he told the man, who wanted the inheritance, I am going to share a number of stories.

There is an old story going around the internet about a very wealthy man who died and went to heaven. An angel guided him on a tour of the celestial city. He came to a magnificent home. **“Who lives there?”** asked the wealthy man. “Oh,” the angel answered, “on earth he was your gardener.” The rich man got excited. If this was the way gardeners live, just think of the kind of mansion in which he would spend eternity. They came to an even more magnificent abode. **“Whose is this?”** asked the rich man almost overwhelmed. The angel answered, “She spent her life as a missionary.” The rich man was really getting excited now. Finally, they came to a tiny eight-by-eight shack with no window and only a piece of cloth for a door. **“This is your home,” said the angel.** The wealthy man was flabbergasted. “I don’t understand. The other homes were so beautiful. Why is my home so tiny?” The angel smiled sadly, “I’m sorry,” he said, “We did all we could with what you sent us to work with.” Remember, Jesus told the inheritance demander in **verse 21 of our Reading, “This is how it is with those who pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in God’s Sight.”** The angel’s point in the story of the Rich Man in Heaven was he was not rich in God’s Sight – he did not store up Treasure in Heaven!

King Duncan reported a story of how “Henry Ford once asked an associate about his life goals. The man replied that his goal was to make a million dollars. A few days later Ford gave the man a pair of glasses made out of two silver dollars. He told the man to put them on and asked what he could see. ‘Nothing,’ the man said. **‘The dollars are in the way.’** Ford told him that he wanted to teach him a lesson: If his only goal was dollars, he would miss a host of greater opportunities.” **“He should invest himself in serving others, not simply in making money.”**

After telling that story, Duncan elaborated, “That’s a great secret of life that far too few people discover. Money is important. No question about that. But money is only a means by which we reach higher goals. Service to others. Obedience to God.” **“God comes to the rich man and says, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’”** Duncan explained, “The answer was clear. The rich man had put his trust in things. Now he was leaving these things behind.” (King Duncan, www.Sermons.com, Collected Sermons)

Especially in our society, it is difficult to not get caught up in chasing after money, wealth, and power. One might even say we need an intervention to help us break free from the temptation to always focus on getting more things and riches. Charles Hoffacker shared part of his own life’s story to help reveal our need for great restraint. He wrote, “When I was a kid, I was often ravaged by poison ivy. The key to poison ivy, once you have it, is not to scratch.” **“Restraining yourself is hard, for your skin itches and you want relief. But scratching only makes poison ivy worse.”**

Hoffacker continued, “Avarice works the same way. We get infected, and we want to scratch, although we know we shouldn’t do so. Possessing more and more promises relief, but only makes the situation worse. We keep scratching, but it’s no solution.”

Hoffacker elaborated, “Jesus issues a warning, a warning inspired by a squabble over inheritance, but one that all of us need to hear.” **“He says: ‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’”**

Hoffacker concluded, “In these few words, Jesus rejects much of what keeps our society humming. He warns us against greed, avarice, the desire to possess more than we need, more than we can use, more than we want.” (Charles Hoffacker, Avarice: The Disease and Its Cure)

David E. Leininger got at the problem Jesus was identifying for the man wanting his inheritance and for us (pause) when he shared, “I was intrigued to read recently of a family that put up a hummingbird feeder with four feeding stations. Almost immediately it became popular with the hummingbirds that lived in the area. Two, three, or even four birds would feed at one time. The feeder would be refilled at least once a day.

Suddenly the usage decreased to almost nothing. The feeder needed filling only about once a week. The reason for the decreased usage soon became apparent.” **“A male bird had taken over the feeder as his property.”** “He was now the only hummingbird who used it. He would feed and then sit in a nearby tree, rising to attack any bird that approached his feeder. Guard duty occupied his every waking hour. He was an effective guard. The only time another bird got to use the feeder was when the self-appointed owner was momentarily gone to chase away an intruder.

That hummingbird was teaching a valuable lesson.” **“By choosing to assume ownership of the feeder, he forfeited his freedom. He was no longer free to come and go as he wished. He was tied to the work of guarding his feeder, his STUFF. He was possessed by his possession.”** (David E. Leininger, Collected Sermons, www.eSermons.com)

Yes, Jesus warned the man wanting his inheritance and us, we need to “pile up riches” not for ourselves but in a way, which makes us rich in God’s Sight. **How do we do that?** First, let me say, seeking the way to “pile up riches” for ourselves – be selfish by doing what makes us rich in God’s Sight fails to understand Jesus’ whole point of his story, his Life, his Public Ministry, and his Manifestation of God’s Agape – Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for us and All of Humanity! Jesus’ Purpose was not the revelation of his own self-interest or even God’s Own Self-Interest. He was sent by the Divine Parent out of God’s Agape Love for All People and for the Whole Sacred Earth.

So, what might be a more appropriate question to ask following our getting Jesus’ message that he gave the man wanting his inheritance? I would say, **“What is of greatest value to God?”** Jesus abundantly demonstrated the answer to my question! What is most important to our Creator is Everyone, the Creation, and the Agape Loving Relationships we manifest as we follow God’s and Jesus’ Examples. **God wants us to accept and live out the Divine Parent’s Invitation to welcome God’s Forgiveness, Grace, and Agape Love in the New Relationship with God.** We do that as we follow Jesus’ example – the New Life in Christ – Forgiving, Inviting, Welcoming, and Agape Loving All People and the Creation. We do that as we seek the Welfare of others, especially the Rejected, Oppressed, the Outcasts, and the Most Vulnerable in Society.

Remember that first story I shared of the Rich Man being shown homes in Heaven? He had so little piled up in heaven because he only sought his own material profit. Jesus’ message was not an attempt to scare people to act in certain ways, so they would profit themselves in heaven. Instead, **Jesus’ Whole Life and Purpose was to Reveal the New Relationship with God and the New Life in Christ enables All People to approach the Wonderful Life God Intends for All People.** That Intended Life from the Creation is one in which we act on God’s Behalf to Forgive, Invite, Welcome, and Seek Justice for All People. Encourage those who are rejected or in despair by Agape Loving them. **Encourage All People to join in the New Life in Christ – the Life of Citizens of God’s Kingdom.** As our Bulletin Cover eludes to, we do not know when God will finally Totally Reveal the Fulfilled Kingdom of God. Our Call is to assume everyday is going to be the Day. Let’s not suffer the Nightmare Jesus described in his story to the man wanting his inheritance. **Let’s “pile up” many riches of Agape Love and God’s Purpose, so All the People are Blessed to Live in the New Relationship with God, Justice for All, and the New Life in Christ of Agape – Self-giving and Sacrificial Love!** Amen.