

Sermon Proper 13 Year C August 1, 2010

If someone came to your door and said you have ten minutes to evacuate your house before it is destroyed, what would you take with you? The answer to this question is as varied as individuals. Yet, researches in Great Britain asked this question and found some interesting answers. They learned that we are more practical than sentimental with nearly half of us (46%) ditching photo albums and family jewels, for important documents such as house insurance. For a fifth of the younger generation, communication devices topped the poll of things they would rescue.

Women are nearly twice as likely to rescue something for sentimental reasons than men (49% to 27%). Women polled said saving handbags, clothes and teddies would be a priority whereas men opted for ipods, Playstations, musical instruments and record collections.

What does this question have to do with church and our readings today?
Everything.

In our Western, postmodern world of wireless e-mail, worldwide Internet, million-dollar condos, aggressive warfare and hectic schedules, do we put so much value in our stuff and personal agendas that we miss the things that really matter?

All our scripture passages today get at what is most important and valuable in life and reminds us that in the end what is most important is God the source of our beginning and the one to whom we shall return.

In the reading from Hosea we hear this prophet writing around the time of the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. The Northern Kingdom aligned themselves with Egypt for protection against the Assyrians in a vain hope to save them. They chose to rely on the false sense of security of foreign alliances rather than on God.

This section today ends a long section in Hosea in which God recounts the sins of the people likening Israel to a wayward child. Yet, like a loving parent we hear in this reading that God's wrath gives way to compassion and again reaches out to his people promising a return to the land. While the southern Judean kingdom lasted until 587 B.C. and was restored after the Babylonian exile in 538 B.C. The northern Kingdom was only fully restored with the creation of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948.

Our psalm today is a thanksgiving hymn, in which the returned exiles praise God who has delivered them from a trackless desert. This psalm is a reminder to us that when we are lost and cannot find our way in the deserts of life God promises to bring us back in spite of what we might have done. Again a theme like a wayward child needing help from the parent.

In our second reading from Colossians the author emphasizes that the members of a true Christian community are to reject their previous immoral lifestyle and reorient their entire lives around Christ as Lord. We are called to live in harmony with each other as we worship and give thanks to God and Christ. We are called to "*set our minds on things above and not on things that are on earth, for you have died and your life*

is hidden with Christ in God.” Setting our minds on the things above does not mean keeping our heads in the clouds but rather to participate in the advancement of God’s kingdom on earth in the here and now. Setting one’s mind on things above means that we make gospel values come alive in our day to day lives.

In our gospel today Jesus provides a parable that directly confronts us as to what is important in life. In the parable of the rich fool we hear how putting his faith in material things is an act truly in vain. There is a stark contrast between what the world says is valuable and what is of real value from a faith perspective.

This is the dilemma that Jesus speaks to in the parable. The word “fool” sounds rather harsh, but it is directed at those who purposely and willingly turn away from God, not those who are driven away by the cruelty of others. Nevertheless, the point Jesus makes is the same for all — richness toward God is the only type of wealth that ultimately matters.

Seeking out comfort in anything but God is futile. Jesus’ warning here is not against wealth per se, but against the false security that wealth and possessions can breed. “One’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15b). The same futility is still present. This is our present day idolatry, putting many things in the place of God. Whether they be possessions, status, people, addictions of all kinds....we are confronted with the same reality....that none of it can replace our ultimate need for God.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta has said on more than one occasion, **you have to love the hole in your heart as much as you love your heart.**

It's taken me some time to understand what she was getting at. What she's tried to teach us is that all of us have this deep hole in ourselves...a place that is never filled. The feeling that we are never complete...a yearning for more. This absence can only be ultimately be filled by God and this is our natural yearning for God. The world tells us that we can fill that empty piece with a new car, a new house, a new diet, looking younger, more money, a better job, but none of it really ever fills that hole. We must learn to love that absent piece, that empty piece as much as we love those things that bring joy to our hearts, like relationships with good friends, our children.

This gospel dramatically shows us the futility of doing anything else. This empty place cannot be filled, by larger barns, bigger crops or anything else....it can only be filled by God. So, rather than a gospel that admonishes us, it is one that simply puts the truth before us every time we read this passage.

When I'm forced to answer the question about what I would take out of my house I too move to the practical along with some important things like the kids favorite blankets, a few photos and the like, but more importantly this gospel reminds me that all of it is fleeting and that ultimately I, like you, are called to make our peace with that empty place that us to varying degrees every day of our lives. So think about it, what would you take? Amen.