

TEXT: Luke 12:13-21
THEME: Life consists in relationships
SUBJECT: Greed
TITLE: Solipsism

Proper 13, Year C
04 August 2019
Messiah Moravian
Jerry Harris

Jesus warns his audience to be on guard against all kinds of greed, for life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. The writer of Colossians calls greed idolatry.

Origen (c.185 - c. 254), was born in Alexandria, became a biblical scholar, theologian and spiritual writer. His father was killed in 202 CE during a persecution of Christians. His mother saved him from martyrdom.

Origen taught that what we love with all our heart and soul and might - this for us is God. Whatever it is that weighs the heaviest in the balance of our affections, that for us is God. Origen feared that with very many the love of gold tipped the scales.

Greed is deadly because it distracts us from what is important in life. It leads to a distorted view of reality and a narrowing of vision and imagination. Greed is actually a symptom of spiritual starvation, a symptom of the lack of meaningful relationships and meaningful work.

The rich man in Jesus' parable has what ever financial service firm is selling: enough money to do whatever he wants. The commercial ends with the rich man sitting on the dock that extends into the lake from his backyard, a smile spreading across his face as his grandson leaps into the lake.

Gold itself, even the love of gold, may not be *the* problem. Listen carefully to the parable: The land of a rich man (he is already rich, already has more than he needs) produced abundantly. He said *to himself*, "What should *I* do, for *I* have no place to store *my* crops?"

The rich man talks only to himself; he does not consult his financial advisor, his priest, not to mention his spouse. We don't even know if he has a family or if anyone else lives with him.

This is a rich man who is about to become even richer. He declares (pay attention to the pronouns), "*I* will do this: *I* will pull down perfectly good barns and build larger ones, and then *I* will store all *my* grain and *my* goods. And *I* will say to *my* soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years, relax, eat, drink, be merry.'"

This rich man is a world unto himself. He thinks only of himself. He cares only for himself and his own comfort and security. He needs no one else and apparently wants no one else in his life. He has his, the rest of the world be damned.

His reverie is interrupted. Another voice, a voice he cannot shut out, cries "You fool!" A consistent theme in the Bible is that life is a gift, the soul is not my possession; it belongs to God and God is free to take as freely as God has given.

Remember Job Naked I came from the womb,
 naked I shall return whence I came.
 The Lord gives and the Lord takes away;
 blessed by the name of the Lord. (1:21)

“You fool!” God cries. “Tonight your life is being demanded of you. And all the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

This question depressed the hell out of the author of Ecclesiastes. He labored long and hard, accumulated much, and all he could think of was the fool who labored not and would inherit his legacy. This led him to conclude that life is futile, one big, bad joke.

Who can rescue us from these two rich, privileged men? Jean Vanier died in May of this year. He was a doctor of philosophy, taught philosophy, served in the Royal Navy in WW II, published books, knew the patterns of success and advancement. Where he discovered life was in relationships.

He learned about the possibility of intentional community while visiting Harlem in the 1940’s. It was here he met the people of Friendship House, experiments in cross-racial living, founded by Catholics, that were cropping up around the US and Canada.

He returned to France and a local priest took him to an institution in Trosly called Val Fleury. Here he saw people with profound disabilities treated as refuse. In 1964 he took three men out of this institution. Two of those men, Raphael and Phillippe, continued to live with Vanier in a house in Trosly, the first L’Arche (the Ark) community.

Today L’Arche consists of 147 communities in 35 countries. In addition, a support group of families of people with disabilities, known as Faith and Light, has spread to 82 countries.

Vanier wrote of the people in L’Arche, “Their fundamental cry is for a relationship, a meeting heart to heart. It is this meeting that awakens them, opens them up to life, and calls them forth to love in great simplicity, freedom, and openness.”

In what does life consist? Jean Vanier found the good life in relationships with those snatched from despair and placed down in homes based on mutuality, respect, and care.

In 2015 he won the Templeton Prize, \$1.7 million dollars honoring his exceptional contributions to affirming the spiritual dimension of life. He donated the money to expand the work of his charities, to “build bigger barns,” not for himself but for those most in need.

Watch, be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for life does not consist in possessions. Neither does life consist in withholding oneself from others, from life itself. Building bigger barns to hoard one’s stuff, building bigger walls to secure oneself against others, is foolish.

The good life consists in meeting heart to heart, in being awakened to the reality of others. The good life is life together. Learning to live together is how we become rich in the sight of God.