

## The Power of Greed

Homily delivered by Rose Riley, August 3, 2025, the 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

And God is able to make all grace abound to you,  
so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need,  
you will abound in every good work.  
2 Corinthians 9:8

Good morning.

So, in this morning's gospel reading from Luke, we have a story of a very rude young man. A young man we think, because he is disputing his inheritance and that's usually what the younger sons do, and rude - well - Jesus was talking with his disciples and a crowd of "many thousands of other people" helping them to understand how to live a life pleasing to God. But this young man walked up to him, waited till he stopped to take a breath and said "Rabbi, you need to make my brother give me my inheritance." Now it certainly seems inappropriate in the mist of this discussion of how to lead a good life that this individual should demand Jesus's attention, demand that Jesus solves a problem between his brother and him about his inheritance.

Admittedly rabbis in that era often did become involved with familial and financial disputes although that was not a role that Jesus took on. So he could have told the young man "You should go to your local rabbi" or he could have said "I'll see you later in the week. Talk to one of my people and get an appointment."

But instead, Jesus, hearing in the young man's brusque demand how important possessions and wealth were to him, said "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" And giving him his full attention said, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

And then, as he so often did, Jesus told a parable.

We heard the parable just a few minutes ago and it was about a wealthy farmer who had such an incredible crop that he planned to build more barns to hold all his harvest. And more than that he felt that he finally had enough wealth, enough grain stored in his barns that he could finally - after a life of hard work, of never having quite "enough" - he could finally sit back and enjoy all the good things life had to offer. Of course, this wealthy farmer felt that all his success was due to him alone. As he talks about his good fortune he doesn't give thanks to God for the clement weather, for the rich soil; doesn't think of the men who diligently work for

him in the fields. Instead, he says to himself, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."

He was indeed a very happy man with all this wealth until God said to him "You fool! - You fool! - This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

How did he feel - this happy man with all his possessions? With death imminent, he would have no opportunity to enjoy his possessions, he wouldn't have those days of ease and pleasure that he was planning. Perhaps as we heard in Ecclesiastes this morning, he would say "I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me."

Did he regret that life of hard work and building up wealth and riches and sharing little? We don't know.

We wonder what he might have done he had some warning, some time to change his ways. But the Bible teaches that you are given warning and instruction on how to live your life in the scriptures. Greed, however, is a hard master and the soul's need to have more and still more is not easily overcome.

We do have another story in the secular realm that does give us an ending - actually a happy ending.

That story is one we all know Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. This is a simple and enjoyable story of a grasping and miserly man brought to his senses by three ghosts - the ghosts of Christmas past, Christmas present and Christmas to come.

Sometimes in our enjoyment I think we might miss a very important message in this story.

Like the foolish farmer, Scrooge needs to keep building up

wealth. He is indeed tight fisted – tight fisted with his employees, his family, the community around him, but also tight fisted with himself, for he allows himself little pleasure, can not say to himself as the farmer did, “Self, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry”.

It is the third ghost who most effects the change in Ebenezer Scrooge when he points with a long and spectral finger at a gravestone. Scrooge unwillingly looks at it and begs that what he is being shown are the “shadows of things that May be”.

As we know from the story Scrooge does get another chance. He wakes up in the morning and goes out into a world made new. A world made new because he has new eyes to see it with, a new heart to feel it with.

Now, we might ask, why didn't Jesus tell a parable more like Dickens story? Well, he could have. The parable could have ended with the wealthy farmer being given a second chance and with him seeing the errors of his way - sharing his wealth with his workmen, seeking out the needy in town and helping them, finding the widows, the prisoners and serving God with a full heart. But then, isn't the point that what he might do after his encounter with God is what he should've been doing all along?

The happy ending of the Dicken's tale has a great deal to teach us but in reality, we are rarely given a warning and a second chance.

Later on in Luke (a few verses beyond the appointed reading for today), Jesus says:

“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return” (Luke 12:35-36).

Or to paraphrase it for the foolish farmer:

Be generous, love others and take joy in their presence. Then if your life should be demanded of you - No, when your life is demanded of you – you will go in peace because you have built up treasure in heaven

Most of us won't have three ghosts to visit us and show us where our lives are lacking. None of us are promised an extra day on this earth and most of us will never receive a warning to change our ways. Instead, we need to listen to scripture, to Jesus as he tells parables, and sometimes even to secular fiction which tells us the same story.

So far this morning we've been talking about the wealthy, foolish farmer in the parable that Jesus tells.

But we haven't focused yet on Jesus's words directly to the young man who interrupted him.

“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

But what exactly is this greed? It's easy to see when we're talking of the foolish wealthy farmer or Ebenezer Scrooge but what is greed when we apply it to ourselves? It seems to be that it would be reasonable to think that God would want us to provide for our families, to have a pleasant home, save for retirement and hopefully even put some money aside for our children when we are gone. But what if these laudable undertakings grow such that they interfere with a person's life – extra hours that must be spent at work to ensure success and more income. What if Sunday mornings need to be spent on the golf course networking with the boss and other managers, what if giving to charity needs to be minimized so that other goals can be met first - a more luxurious home in a better neighborhood, a bigger car, a hefty inheritance for the children? What then? What if greed becomes an addiction? What if it fills the heart and leaves no room for love of others, Indeed leaves no room for love of self.

The foolish farmer could not put his feet up and relax until he had such an abundance of wealth that he couldn't imagine how he could use it all.

And Scrooge, if you remember was so tight fisted that he stored up gold even at the expense of his own comfort - his fire was small, his tea weak, his gruel thin.

Greed is such a hard task master, demanding all of one's being while providing only a momentary sense of satisfaction to be quickly replaced with a continuing hunger for “More”.

Paul in the reading from Colossians this morning calls greed “idolatry”. Idolatry as in worshiping in the temple of Mammon - worshiping wealth and possessions. In Luke 16:13 and Matthew 6:24, Jesus warns his followers that no one can serve both mammon and God, as “worshippers will always come to loathe one but love the other.”

It seems to me that in America today and perhaps in the world at-large, there is an epidemic of greed. An epidemic reflected not only in individuals but also in our institutions and governments. An epidemic of

empty souls demanding "More" even though what they already have is enough to provide them for many lifetimes - or to care for the destitute, the starving and homeless throughout the world. Empty souls demanding "More" to fill an inner emptiness which greed creates and greed sustains.

But perhaps for the farmer and Scrooge, and for many of us as well, greed seems a bulwark against this very fear and emptiness.

We heard in Psalm 49 this morning:

The wickedness of those who put their trust in their goods, \* and boast of their great riches?

We can never ransom ourselves, or deliver to God the price of our life;"

Fearful words unless we remember that the ransom has already been paid by another and that, as Micah teaches us, we are called simply to

"do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God".

But greed still interferes with our ability to love God and our neighbor – and ourselves. Michael K. Marsh, a retired Episcopal priest and creator of the Interrupting the Silence website, reflects on greed as follows:

"Greed uses external things to deal with internal matters and it rarely works. It leaves us wanting more, always seeking the next dollar, the next book, the next word of approval. The thing is, that greed steals and deprives us of what we most want. Greed thieves us of our lives."

I would add greed deprives us of the most human joys - those of loving and sharing, of bringing joy to others.

So let's return for just a moment to *A Christmas Carol* and think of the Christmas morning when Scrooge awoke. Think of the utter joy he felt: joy in greeting people on the street, joy of giving to the poor, joy of loving and being loved by family and friends. It is as if greed had been replaced in his heart with joy.

I think that's the message that today's readings brings to us: all the possessions, our wealth and riches are vanities - of no meaning - if with them we do not remain vigilant to have love and caring in our hearts.

Amen

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