

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Rector

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus:²

“Set not thy heart upon thy goods; and say not, I have enough for my life. Follow not thine own mind and thy strength, to walk in the ways of thy heart: And say not, Who shall controul me for my works? for the Lord will surely revenge thy pride. Say not, I have sinned, and what harm hath happened unto me? for the Lord is longsuffering, he will in no wise let thee go. Concerning propitiation, be not without fear to add sin unto sin: And say not His mercy is great; he will be pacified for the multitude of my sins: for mercy and wrath come from him, and his indignation resteth upon sinners. Make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day: for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed, and perish in the day of vengeance. Set not thine heart upon goods unjustly gotten, for they shall not profit thee in the day of calamity. Winnow not with every wind, and go not into every way: for so doth the sinner that hath a double tongue. Be stedfast in thy understanding; and let thy word be the same.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirteenth Verse of the twelfth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke:³

“And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of cove-

tousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

If you were going to live in foreign country, what would you do? Many of you know the routine because you've done it. You learn the language as well as you can before you go. You familiarize yourself with the laws and the customs. You pack for the climate. You dig out your passport. And you exchange your American dollars for the currency of that country.

Well, the fact is that we are all going on a trip one of these days and we are going to live in a country that is very different from the one we live in now. The country I am talking about is what Jesus called "The Kingdom of God". Most people call it "Heaven."

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxiv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² *Ecclesiasticus* 5:1-10 (KJV).

³ St. Luke 12:13-21 (KJV).

⁴ St. Luke 12:15 (KJV).

The Kingdom of God is not exactly a foreign country. It is actually, as St. Thomas Aquinas calls it in one of our hymns, “our own true native land.” We are citizens of The Kingdom of God, living temporarily in a country that is quite different. Our baptismal certificate is our birth certificate, identifying us as citizens of the Kingdom of God. It also serves as our passport when we die.

I tell people when I give them their baptismal certificate that they need to take care of it because St. Peter is going to want to see it when they arrive at the pearly gates. I’m not really serious about that because even if you lose your certificate, there is a record of your baptism in the parish register where it took place and, more importantly, there is record of it in heaven. The point is it’s your baptism that makes you a citizen of The Kingdom of God.

But you still need to make more preparations for the journey than simply looking up your baptism. You’ve been living in the world so long you’ve become acclimated to it. Before you go to your true home, you need to learn the laws and customs, which you have already begun to do here in church. You need to learn the language of Heaven, which is the language of praise. It might turn out to be the universal language of music, some of which you have already been exposed to right here. You don’t need to worry about the climate because it is always warm and bright with the constant presence of God. And you can’t take your clothes with you anyway. You enter that Kingdom as you entered this one. A white robe and golden slippers will be provided on arrival.

You can send some of your wealth on ahead, but notice I did not say money. Money is not legal tender in heaven, and besides, there is an export embargo on it. No money can ever leave this world.

That is also true of everything that this world values. You can't take it with you. You have to leave it all behind when you die.

The man in the parable that was read this morning may have known that, but he is called a fool because he did not act accordingly. He saw his problem as a storage problem. What am I going to do with all of this worldly wealth?

There were answers readily at hand. He could have given some to the poor or to others who might need it for some worthwhile project. He could have given beyond his tithe to the priests for use in the worship and life of the temple. He could have spent some of his wealth on travel and carried his faith to other lands. But he chose not to do any of that. He chose to hold onto it all, and, of course, he wound up losing it all.

The question, "Whose then will these things be?" can be answered by leaving a will, but the point is they will not be yours. And I might add that from the Biblical point of view, they never were. They were simply placed in your hands by God for you to manage.

I guess you can see where this is going. It is going where all parables go. A parable goes directly into the life of the hearers and demands a decision. How do I see myself in this story and what am I going to do about it?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks about laying up treasure in heaven. He talks about how what is considered to be treasure in this world is subject to decay and to theft. He talks about treasure in heaven, where nothing ever gets old and nothing can be stolen. But notice he does not mention money because what passes for currency in heaven is not the same as what passes for currency in this world.

The currency of this world consists of things that are finite, measurable, and material. The currency of heaven is spiri-

tual and can neither be measured nor contained. So what does it consist of? It consists of those things that St. Paul calls "the gifts of the Spirit."

Do you remember that list that was read to you last week in the Epistle? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control: those are the kinds of things that constitute heavenly treasure. Those are the kinds of things that wise men seek to accumulate in this world because they are transferable to the next. The treasures of this world are the things that fools accumulate and try to figure out how to preserve.

Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." You might think it would be the other way around. But if your treasure is defined as what you value the most, then your attention and your efforts and your loyalties will be directed to wherever that may be found.

So the question the parable raises is the question I direct to you. What does your treasure consist of and what do you intend to do with it? Or to put it another way, are you a wise man or woman, or are you a fool?

The parable is introduced in the Gospel by a dispute over an inheritance, which Jesus is asked to settle. If I may paraphrase His reply, Jesus says, "Don't bother me with that stuff. I have more important things to deal with."

And so do you.

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