**SUNDAY JULY 31, 2022**

**LUKE 12: 13 - 21**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Today we consider a lesson every child is supposed to learn at her mother’s knee, or at least in nursery school: the importance of sharing. A simple, but vital lesson: it is good to share, being selfish is not helpful in the long run.

But first, where are we in the story as brought to you by St. Luke? Jesus has been baptized in the River Jordan by his ‘voice in the wilderness’ cousin John, overcome the temptations of Satan, called his disciples, done many healings and a good deal of teaching, calmed the waters during the storm, sent out first the Twelve, then the Seventy, preached his great sermon on the plain, not the mount as Matthew had it, taught us how to pray, been recognized as the Messiah by Peter, and has once foretold his approaching crucifixion to his closest followers: in short, Jesus is well into his ministry in the Galilee, and has yet to think seriously about turning his face towards Jerusalem for that final confrontation with the powers of sin and death at the hands of the Romans.

Remember that old children’s hymn, Tell Me the Stories of Jesus? Well, Luke is telling us all the stories he could find about Jesus, whether from eyewitnesses, who would have been very old by the time Luke was writing, or the children or grandchildren of those eyewitnesses, or a volume of the sayings of Jesus. Luke was a well educated man, who wrote a polished story in elegant Greek, the whole New Testament was written in Greek, but Jesus keeps shining through. My point is that by this time, Jesus was famous all through the countryside, people were leaving their jobs to follow him and hear him speak, some for only a day or two, quite a few for months, several for the rest of their lives. And such was the magnetism of Jesus and the vital importance of what he had to say that millions upon millions of people are still telling each other the stories nearly two thousand years later.

Some, if not a substantial portion of those people, the first followers, were sick, or carrying sick children, and looking for a healing. Many of them wanted to know more about being in a relationship with a loving God. Many of them were sorely oppressed and looking for relief. And they all had questions, or requests. Including the one that opens our Scripture passage this morning.

Somebody in the crowd wants Jesus to tell the fellow’s brother to share the family inheritance with him. Of course, Jesus is way too smart to fall for that one, he says at once that he’s not the judge nor arbitrator. Judgement he leaves to God in the end times. But Jesus has a warning: beware of greed, he says, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

How true. Only kings and emperors have it displayed on their tombs that they conquered so many lands and ruled over so many people. Have you ever seen a headstone on a grave that read that so and so was the richest man in all of Texas? You might be able to tell by the size and splendour of the stone that the person buried beneath it was wealthy, but he couldn’t take any part of his wealth with him. We all arrive on the other side with nothing but our memories to our names. Remember that old bumper sticker with the slogan, ‘the one who dies with the most toys wins’? Not true my friends. Not true at all. You can’t take it with you. Not even asbestos futures. Robert A. Heinlein said, or maybe quoted, in one of his books, ‘the wise man is prepared to abandon all his baggage at least once in his lifetime’. By the way, because I first read it so young, it took me many years to realize that he meant that we part with everything we own, including our bodies, when we die. But what goes on our headstone is the message we or our families want to send, that the dear departed was much loved, or well known for philanthropy, or gave their life to save others, or did much good in the community. People remembered for their greed do not receive a lot of kind thoughts when they die. Think of the lesson that Marley taught Scrooge that fateful Christmas Eve in the 1840’s.

Thirty thousand years ago, our Mesolithic ancestors lived a hunter gatherer lifestyle. We know almost nothing about them except from a handful of their bones and their stone tools. Quite likely at least some of them lived in huts filled to the rafters with baskets woven from twigs and reeds full of food, and nets for fishing, and weapons made from wood and antlers or stones, and leather clothes, and furs for their beds, and things needed to make art and decorations, and things needed for worship, all sorts of things, practically nothing of which survives today, except for a few fragile grave goods. So even if they managed to accumulate a huge surplus of goods, what good did it do them? We all go to meet our Maker with nothing but our memories, the record of our deeds, the kind of life we lived to show to our Redeemer. And Judge.

And greed is one of the more difficult sins to live with: we try to fill a bottomless hole with material goods, to the impoverishment of our neighbours, and to no avail, because we are trying to substitute material goods for what we are really missing in our lives: love. It can’t be done. No amount of gold or fast cars or land or houses or electronic toys outweighs simple, profound love, divine and human. And to get love, we must give love. God loves us, God calls upon us to share our material goods, especially when we have a surplus.

Alexander Solzynitzchen said in his book about the Gulag Archipelago that on the day his last possession was stolen from him, he felt a curious sense of relief: now he had nothing left to worry about. Another reason not to indulge in greed, you have to worry about keeping and maintaining the things you have accumulated. This isn’t to say that prudent people shouldn’t save for retirement or make plans for buying food to feed the family next winter. But getting and keeping a great surplus of whatever is the focus of your greed is greedy, and not worth it in the long run.

Jesus says “for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions”. God the judge is not going to ask you what you have acquired in lifetime, but what you did with it. Did you share it with the poor and needy? Did you do good with it? Or did you keep it close to your heart as a dragon rests upon its hoard?

Because as Jesus points out about the wealthy farmer who rejoices in his superfluity of grain in his granaries, that fool is going to die that very night, and what good will he get from all his bushels and bushels of wheat and barley? Greed will give only the briefest of satisfaction before the need for yet more of whatever it is that you covet rises again. It’s an addiction. Not worth it my friends. Quoth the bookaholic (me).

So this week, let us think about our own personal greediness. How is it affecting our lives and the lives of our nearest and dearest? Have we spent the family money on flashy shoes or too much chocolate? We need to take an honest look at how much of our worldly goods that are surplus to our needs are we truthfully sharing. I don’t like answering that question honestly either, being a long sight further from my ideals than I like to think. Sigh. Perhaps we can take a couple of baby steps towards fixing that situation. Simplify life, worry less, get closer to God. It’s all to the good.

And let me close as I always do, with the reminder that we have the Holy Spirit on our side, guiding and advising us, in this room and all rooms, at this time and all times, resting quietly in our hearts, making the whole thing easier. All we need do is listen, and God’s peace is upon us.

Amen.