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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Pentecost 8

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, I want to begin this sermon by singing for you a stanza from a song by Don Henley.

“Baby picks off your plate—yours looks better
And she throws her on the floor
Here, in the home of the brave
And land of the free
The first word baby learns in ‘more’”

That stanza comes from the song titled, “Gimme What You Got,” again by the artist Don Henley.

And as we ponder our gospel reading this morning, I would have us think of those lyrics.

“The first word baby learns in ‘more.’”

Now, in truth the first word that a baby learns is “mama” or “dad dad.”

It usually isn’t the word “more.”

But even if “more” isn’t the first word we learn, it soon becomes so, doesn’t it?

Yes, the concept of “more” is a concept we come to understand pretty quickly in life.

We want more of this or more of that.

More power. More prestige. More money.

More square footage in the home we plan to buy.

More luxury in the car we want to own.

More status in our place of employment.

More recognition in the circle of people we frequent.

More, more, more.

Indeed, the concept of “more” may not be our first word, but it is a concept we learn soon enough in life, and it is a concept that seems to rule our lives.

And yes, it is this word “more” our Gospel reading for today, although the word “more” doesn’t appear in the text per se.

But we see there in between the lines. We hear whispered in the parable.

It is a word that haunts the rich man in the parable, so much so, that he (the rich man) speaks to his own haunted soul.

“What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops. I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, and be merry.’”

PAUSE

Now, the situation that prompts Jesus to tell this parable is such that a man in a crowd following Jesus demands of Jesus, “Teacher, TELL my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.”

This man doesn’t politely ask Jesus, saying, “Jesus, would you please ask my brother to divide the family inheritance with me?”

This man doesn’t politely ask Jesus. He doesn’t respectfully inquire of Jesus.

No, this man DEMANDS Jesus to talk to this man’s brother, and to tell him to divide the family inheritance.

And, I have to imagine that Jesus is not a little disgusted by the man’s words.

Indeed, Jesus replies to the man, “Friend, who set me to be judge or arbitrator over you?”

More likely, Jesus’ words are meant to sound like this, “Dude, what is wrong with you to talk to me like that? I don’t have any legal authority to decide your case.”

Yes, Jesus is probably not a little disgusted, but to Jesus’ credit Jesus tempers his response to the man by addressing him as “friend.”

Jesus is certainly diplomatic in that way, so as to call the man “friend” before he expresses his disgust.

Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?

What is wrong with you, Friend, such that you would demand from me something I am not empowered to do?

But, then Jesus would seem to pause and then Jesus speaks not just to the man, but to the whole crowd.

Indeed, Jesus does show his authority by speaking the Word of God to the situation.

Jesus says, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.”

Another way to interpret Jesus words is like this: “Take care! Be on your guard against all ways in which you seek MORE.”

All kinds of greed are all the ways we desire to have more.

Greed means so much more than mere “money.”

That phrase “all kinds of greed” can also mean lust for power, prestige, status...

All those things we already mentioned and then some.

PAUSE

Yes, Jesus does indeed use his authority here to speak the Word of God to the situation for all the crowd to hear.

And he does so, probably because he is disgusted by the man demanding Jesus to talk to his brother.

That is pretty presumptuous.

But, Jesus may also have spoken here to the crowd about being on one’s guard against all kinds of greed, because Jesus notices “something” in the tone of the man’s demand.

In the man’s tone, Jesus likely noticed that the man and his brother who has perhaps absconded with the family inheritance...

Jesus likely has noticed that the relationship between the man and his brother is presently strained, in all likelihood as the result of this squabble over the family inheritance.

Who knows, the brothers may have already had a bad relationship and the question of the family inheritance has only exacerbated the situation.

But, I like to think that the two brothers were on good terms before the question of the family inheritance entered the question.

And, it is only as a result of the disagreement about who should get what in regards to the family inheritance, that they are now at odds with one another.

Yes, I think Jesus is responding to the man in disgust for the disrespect Jesus is shown.

But, I also think Jesus is addressing the larger issue before the whole crowd, the larger issue being that greed destroys relationships.

As soon as one party starts grabbing for more...

As soon as one party begins to be greedy...

As soon as one party declares, "I am entitled to more. I am deserving of more. This is mine."

As soon as that happens, it can't help but hurt someone.

As soon as the concept of "more" enters the picture, as soon as someone feels shortchanged, then we can be pretty sure some relationship has gone sour.

And on a global scale it can be devastating.

We watch Putin making a power grab, we listen to Putin saying, "Ukraine belongs to the Russian Nation. It is mine," and what do we see, but countless people get hurt, not just Ukrainians, and Russians, but also those who are dependent on grains coming out of Ukraine, and truly the world at large.

So many people are hurting, all because one person wants more.

And, pray tell is the point of any of us wanting more and more, when in the end we can't take it with us.

To return that song by Don Henley, final stanza says:

You spend your whole life
 Just pilin' it up there
 You got stacks and stacks and stacks
 Then, Gabriel comes taps you on your shoulder
 But you don't see no hearses with luggage racks
 You can't take it with you.

PAUSE

So there is a word that is the opposite of "more."

There is a word, a concept with which God WOULD have us be mindful, an opposing concept to stave off that perpetual desire for more.

It is a word, a concept that the author John Bogle writes about in a book by the same title.

Bogle tells this story in his book.

At a party given by a billionaire on Shelter Island, the late Kurt Vonnegut (of *Slaughter House Five* fame)...

At a party given by a billionaire on Shelter Island, Vonnegut informs his pal, the author Joseph Heller (of *Catch-22* fame)...

Vonnegut and Heller are talking at this party, and they are talking about their host, this billionaire who is a hedge fund manager...

And Vonnegut notes that their host made more money in a single day than Heller had earned in total sales from his wildly popular novel *Catch-22*...

The hedge fund manager made more money than Heller earned from all the sales of his book.

To which then Heller responded to Vonnegut, saying, "Yes, but I have something that our host, the billionaire, will never have..."

And what is that?

A one of kind work of art?

A house in a certain locale?

A woman who loves him for who he is?

What is it that Heller has that the billionaire will never have?

Heller said to Vonnegut, "I have...enough."

Enough.

That is the magical word, that is the all-powerful mindset that undoes the sin of all kinds of greed.

To be content with what one already has, to be satisfied with having what is necessary, to have "enough."

To have the mindset of "enough," means that one is able to share and even to share abundantly.

That is the difference with greed and having enough.

Greed leads to hoarding. Greed leads to collecting more and more around one's self.

Greed leads to pilin' it up there, so that we have stacks and stacks and stacks.

On the other hand, having enough frees us to be able to be a blessing to others by sharing from our abundance.

But the trick is to see ourselves as already having a great abundance.

And granted that is hard to do, especially when the news stokes our fear with news of rampant inflation, and the concern about a recession.

It is hard to see ourselves as having an abundance when all we see are prices going up in the grocery store and at the fuel pump.

It is hard to see ourselves as having an abundance when the stock market has taken a sharp downward turn.

It is hard to see ourselves as having an abundance when all these things bombard us, and the economic outlook can look so dire.

But then, but then we are reminded that the goal of fear is to distrust God.

Fear seeks to make us put our faith in something other than God.

After all, that is ultimately what is wrong with the man in our parable. This man has put his trust in all the goods he has stored up.

He fears “scarcity of goods,” while his real problem is scarcity of faith in God. He is not rich toward God.

In short, we could say, we should say, that faith and trust in God engenders the understanding that we already have “enough.”

God has saved us in Christ. God has promised us salvation. We have eternal life. What more than could we possibly desire or want.

Of course, this does not mean that we throw caution to the wind and believe that we don’t need to provide for our daily needs...

But knowing that we are saved, that we have eternal life, puts everything else in the proper perspective.

That feeling of having “enough...” That feeling of satisfaction, of contentment, starts with our faith in God, and acknowledging the abundance we have in his Son’s death and resurrection.

This is our joy. This is our foundation in life. This is our treasure that reaches into eternal life.

Thanks be to God. Amen.