

**8 Pentecost  
August 4, 2019**

**In the name of the God of all creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.  
Amen.**

In today's reading from Luke's Gospel a man calls out to Jesus and asks him to be the judge concerning an inheritance. Jesus refuses to be drawn into the dispute as an arbitrator, and he warns the people around him about being greedy. Then Jesus told them a parable about a man whose harvest was so bountiful that he decided to tear down his barns and build new ones so that he may have "ample goods laid up for many years" so that he can then "relax; eat, drink and be merry." However, this man's plans had a fatal flaw ... the man died that very night. Jesus ... or at least the redactor of the story ... ends with the moral: "So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves, but are not rich toward God."

Last week's gospel reading from Luke included the Lord's Prayer, and one of the petitions in that prayer is a request that we not be tempted. The fact is that in this materialistic age many people are "tempted" with the "treasures" of this world. For Jesus the other side of that temptation is the option of being "rich" toward God and God's creation.

Many people in our world today live out of scarcity and/or greed and believe that the wealth of the world is to be harvested for their own personal benefit. However, others live in this world with an attitude of abundance, and they seek ways to share the world's wealth with all of God's creatures. One has only to look at the economic recession we experienced a decade ago to see the consequences that the greed on Wall Street. Along with unregulated banking, it caused to the millions of people to become unemployed or underemployed ... many lost their houses and homes and their savings vanished ... all while fund managers in New York City were still receiving obscene bonuses.

Jesus' words are: "One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Clearly, Jesus is talking about material possessions. However, the choices we have to make in our lives deal in all kinds of currency ... material possessions for sure, but also emotional and spiritual currencies as well. So, what does this mean to people who take seriously what Jesus took seriously?

When I was a graduate student in Indiana studying mathematics, I lived in an apartment upstairs from my landlady, Elsie. In the entrance hallway Elsie had stacks upon stacks of old magazines, and when she invited me into her living room there were magazines piled everywhere ... some were decades old. I thought it odd at the time, but I was politely quiet and never asked her about it. Then one day lightning struck ... literally. A bolt of lightning hit the house and caused a small electrical fire in her kitchen. I wasn't home when it happened, but I arrived as the firemen were packing up their gear and the fire marshal was speaking with Elsie.

The fire hadn't caused much damage and so we could occupy the house, but the fire marshal told Elsie to get rid of all the magazines ... either that or she would be cited.

As I helped Elsie carry the piles of old periodicals out to the curb she told me the story of her hoarding. As a child, Elsie had grown up in a relatively poor family. Her father worked in a series of different jobs, but what Elsie remembered more than anything else was her father coming home late on Fridays, after he had gotten paid, and he would be drunk ... and he was physically and psychologically abusive to Elsie's mother. Although he never threatened Elsie, Elsie's mother took out her pain on her daughter in various ways.

When Elsie was in the fifth grade, she bought a subscription to a teenage monthly publication at a school fair. On the day the first issue arrived, she came home from school to find her mother in a rage. Elsie's mother tore the magazine apart and threw it at Elsie. "If your father won't let me have any magazines, then you aren't going to have any either." Elsie went on to say that she never saw another copy of her subscription. However, she started buying other magazines ... and she hid every copy. She admitted that she had just gotten to the place where she couldn't bring herself to throw them away.

Obviously Elsie's mother lived in great scarcity ... emotional scarcity as well as material scarcity. Just as Elsie's father withheld magazines from her mother ... no doubt a sign of withholding love as well ... Elsie's mother had to withhold that love ... and the magazines from her own daughter. No wonder Elsie hoarded those magazines.

The choices we have to make in our lives deal in all kinds of currency ... material possessions for sure, but also emotional and spiritual currencies as well. Some of those currencies have to do with power ... some have to do with love ... some have to do with self-worth. Some people grow up in an environment of scarcity and try to surround themselves with the currency that affirms their life. Yet others grow up in an environment of abundance and learn that their value and their worthiness is not dependent upon what they have, but what they can give away or share ... love, affirmations, compliments, hospitality, control, even power.

Some people live in such scarcity that they are suspicious of everything and everyone ... "What's in it for me?" is their default question. They see the glass as always half-empty and assume they are getting short-changed. Rather than ask questions, they assume the worse, and strategize a defense.

Those who live with an abundance of spirit choose trust rather than suspicion. They are curious and ask questions before making choices. And, if they assume anything at all, it is that the other is deserving of respect.

We ... at St. Cyprian's ... are a people of abundance. Abundance of spirit ... an abundance of trust ... an abundance of hospitality ... and, obviously, an abundance of resources. Last week I announced that this congregation has exceeded our fundraising goal for the ***Beyond The***

**Commons** campaign. We were aiming at raising \$100,000. Yes, we have exceeded \$100,000 ... we have already received pledges and gifts totaling more than \$170,000!

My joy in sharing this with you today is not just about the numbers, as great as they may be. My joy ... our joy ... is also about the enthusiastic spirit and amazing commitment of this congregation to which those numbers point. It is about the trust this congregation has in the leadership of this church ... and our trust in a loving God to lead us to fulfill our special ministry of radical transforming hospitality in this place. It is about this congregation's commitment to our core value of "welcoming all" ... a core value that is a hallmark of this community of St. Cyprian's ... and a commitment that undergirds our ministry in this congregation to this neighborhood, this city, and to the world around us. This is also about a people who live with a spirit of abundance rather than scarcity ... an abundance of heart and soul as well as an abundance of tangible resources to be given away in love.

So far we have received 50 pledges and gifts representing over 75 persons in this community of faith. This week we mailed a second letter to 38 persons inviting them to participate in the campaign. Our goal at this point is to give everyone in this church an opportunity to share in the future of St. Cyprian's. If you are one of those who has not yet made a pledge or gift, I encourage you to do so, regardless of its size. As with those pledges and gifts we have already received, we trust you will contribute commensurate with your ability to do so. It is our trust that we all live with a spirit of abundance, and are "rich toward God."

The reading from Luke's Gospel this morning is a teaching about the consequences of living in scarcity and greed. It invites us to live in abundance ... the magnificent abundance of God's creation and the knowledge that we are all blessed children of God and made in God's image. The outcome of our fundraising campaign is not just that we have exceeded our goal, it is also that we are a community of abundance ... abundance of spirit ... an abundance of heart and soul ... and abundance of generosity and charity. May we, as this family of St. Cyprian's, always be an environment of abundance ... the abundance of God's love to be shared with all we encounter ... an abundance of respect that offers trust rather than suspicion ... an abundance of joy in our life together that invites others to become a part of our family.

As I said at the kickoff of this campaign, ***Beyond the Commons*** is not just a fundraising campaign attached to increasing our size with brick and mortar additions. ***Beyond the Commons*** is grounded in our core values. It is an extension of who we are, and what we do. This is not about me, or the Mission Board. It is about you. You are the Church. You are the Body of Christ in this place, at this time. It is your church.

With God's help, we are making a difference. With God's help, our faith is making a difference. We come here week by week to celebrate the liturgy, so that we can go out into the world transformed by God's unconditional hospitality and extend that transforming and radical hospitality to others in the world around us. That is what ***Beyond the Commons*** is about. I appreciate your amazing support ... and we seek the participation of all who see themselves a part of this community of faith.

You are the church! You are a people of abundance! You are a people “rich toward God.”

Amen.