

## **IT'S MINE AND YOU CAN'T HAVE IT**

*A sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. Nadene Grieve-Deslippe on August 1, 2010  
Crossroads United Church, Kingston*

**Hosea 11:1-11**

**Luke 12:13-21**

The gospel lesson for today allows us to ponder several things. It is testament to both the wisdom that Jesus possessed and his skills as a pedagogue. He had been approached by a man who was appealing to Jesus to intercede on his behalf and make the man's brother give him a portion of the family inheritance. Jesus opts not to take sides and do the man's bidding. He does not appeal to the heir's sense of generosity or justice. In fact, he seizes the request to teach on the wiliness of greed that is silently and implicitly inherent. It is a classic example of both the timeliness of the gospel and the timelessness of it.

Every generation has its clan members who discern that there should be a particular distribution of assets and property upon the death of a patriarch or matriarch. And while it does not necessarily ensue at every celebration of life that I have been associated with, it often rears its ugly head at some. I have conducted funerals where a family has become so fractured over wills and frets over who will receive what, that they refuse to be in the same room at the visitation. I recently celebrated a life where one part of the family was lead in by one Funeral Director and sat on one side of the chapel, and the other faction was lead in by another Director and seated on the other side. There were two receptions at two different homes because the siblings refused to cooperate. The result was, that rather than make a choice to attend two so as not to collude with the disharmony, most attendees attended neither. The family continued to lose the support and respect of those that they needed most because of expectation and want- not that there was even very much at stake.

I do not want to overstate the intentions of the unnamed individual but it seems reasonable that he has a very clear notion of what he wants his brother to concede. I make the assumption that he has approached his brother with his request and that he

and his brother do not see eye to eye. So he appeals to Jesus' sense of fair play. In wisdom Jesus discerned that there was an undercurrent of desire at play and this is what he seizes as a teaching moment. He does not render a judicial decision but rather tells a story that is intended to have the hearer ponder what is paramount in life: being rich in possessions or rich towards God.

Jesus does not give the man what he asks for-a judgment- he is given only a story. A story that reminds that the things of this world which we value much- those things that we can see and touch and assure us, to some degree, not only of our value but our security- are not as important in the life that is to come. When things usurp the value of the human condition; when lives are swept aside in blind apathy and creature comfort and security for the self reigns supreme then we are impoverished in the sight of God-regardless of the size of the barns and bank account. When we hold tight to things that belong to us-modeling in action the words that we uttered in the immaturity of childhood, it's mine and you can't have it- we are the impoverished. Jesus refused to judge whose greed was the imperative. The brother who refused to share or the brother who demanded that he is made to share.

Blaise Pascal once postulated, " In each action we must look beyond the action at our past, present and future state, and at others whom it affects, and see the relation of all those things. And then we shall be very cautious." Certainly this is true in life altering and life threatening situations. An unhappy partner in a committed relationship usually looks at how the decision to withdraw from the relationship will affect significant other and children. One being advised by a specialist to pursue a particular treatment or procedure will want to be apprised of risks and possible side effects. The moment of absolute certainty may not arrive, and there will be consequences in trying and not trying, and in staying or leaving, but a decision needs to be made, and decisions ordinarily have consequences. However, not everything is within our control.

While the character in the parable may be lauded for his ability to prepare for his future, his future was short lived, and who would reap the rewards of his life savings?

And while I will not stand among you and encourage you to care not an iota for the future- eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die- I do want to encourage us all to live our lives mindfully, as well as faithfully. While most days unfold in the rote routine of the previous, it is not always the case.

I was driving home one evening this week around 9 o'clock after helping one of our daughters unpack boxes in a new apartment. I was tired, dirty and sore and simply wanted to get home and clean myself up. There had been an accident at the intersection by the church around 5:00 o'clock. I drove up Sir John A expecting my drive home to be without incident. The intersection was taped off and there were three police cruisers still on the scene, as well as the vehicles involved. As I looked at the flashing lights and needed to wind my way through the mall across the street to get home I felt an immediate fear and affinity for those involved.

I knew not who had hit whom, nor did I know at the time what the consequences of the impact had been. I was moved to pray. I asked for God's blessing upon those involved, and their families and on all who had attended to them-police, and ambulance. I prayed for the peace and well being of their respective families and significant others who might be affected by what their partner and parent had encountered in the course of an ordinary workday, and the reminder of the uncertainty of human life immediately overwhelmed me.

It was a reminder to not take time or routine for granted, for on any given day we can have our sense of time and our routine completely altered by circumstances. It was a reminder of what is truly paramount and imperative in our choices every day because we may not have an opportunity again to say or do something that we assumed there would yet and still be time to say and do.

The parable of the rich fool is a profound example of both the timelessness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the timeliness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It reflects the character of one that has a pronounced work ethic, and is committed to the future. And

in many ways the character in the story could be admired for the life plan that he has set out for himself. Were the story to occur in our setting, it would probably be about maximizing one's worth and solidifying one's future through investment, and RSP's and a diversified portfolio. However, the context is first century Galilee, and the man in the parable is an experienced, successful and well to do farmer.

And make no mistake; the character of the farmer is not seemingly, flawed, and his agenda may even be judged as wise. He breaks no laws of convention or social more. He is not labeled unjust. He is not accused of any criminal act, nor does he take his labourers for granted. He is not highlighted as one who has abused his authority or mistreated his staff, and yet he is labeled a fool. Why? He is a fool because he lives completely for himself. He talks to himself. He plans for himself. He even congratulates himself on his careful planning. His sudden death proves him to have been committed to less than stellar values. For when he decides that he finally has enough to sit back and enjoy life, his life is demanded of him.

The teaching is timeless because I daresay in every generation, until the kingdom comes, there will be those who live entirely for the self. It is timely because the test of the gospel is its ever-present application and practicality. Quite simply, we are being encouraged to place our trust in the unseen over the seen, and in the intangible over the tangible and that can be quite challenging especially in an age of economic uncertainty, downsizing, cost cutting and low interest rates. The nigglesome question remains: are we rich in possessions and poor in relation to God?

As Crossroads church continues its foray into the future my hope is two fold. First that we will live and respond in the moment to the face of need, and that we will be as rich towards God in the living of our mission into the future. We are to live our lives as individuals and as a community holding two seeming opposite ideas in tension. First, to conduct ourselves as though we would have a secure and long future. At the same time, we are to live financially, spiritually and morally as though today were our last day. May God bless us with eyes to see, and ears to hear and hearts to respond. Amen.