

Pentecost 10 Year C

“You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

Andy and Sid loved golf. They played it every chance they could. They played every course they could until a heart attack took Andy away and, although he loved the game, Sid stopped playing.

One night Sid was awakened from his sleep by a familiar voice calling “S_I_D, S_I_D.” Sid, startled, sat up and asked, “Is that you, Andy?” To which the specter replied, “Yes, Sid, it’s me.” “Are you in heaven,” Sid asked? To which the ghost replied, “yes!” “Tell me Andy, is there golf in heaven?” “Oh, yes”, Andy replied, “and guess what, good news, you tee up tomorrow at nine.”

That’s an old joke and an old movie theme, when someone tells you that you are going to die tomorrow. But most of the time no one gives you the exact time or date of your earthly demise.

Recently, a physician released a book about the present art of medicine and he vented his concern about the fact that doctors are seldom honest with their patients and themselves about accepting the reality of imminent death. They keep trying things and trying things and sometimes the medicine is even worse than the letting go, but hope, for most of us, is a strong emotion. We always have something left undone, something to finish.

I have had in my life three very close life/death experiences and yet it never entered my mind that I was going to die, mainly because I had appointments to fill or things to resolve.

When the day comes that I don’t have an appointment or a deadline I’ll have to ask myself the same question that someone asked the great Augustinian theologian, Martin Luther. “What would you do, Martin, if you knew you were going to die tomorrow?” Martin is said to have responded, surprisingly, “If I knew I was going to die tomorrow, I would plant a tree today.”

Of course, if we knew that we were never going to die we would become lazy. Constantly putting things off until tomorrow. We would probably be late for appointments since no one would particularly care why they were meeting or how long meetings lasted. You would probably be firmly rooted in the present, with little care about the future and no interest in the past. There would always be time to “get it right.”

Which brings us to today’s account from Luke. This rich man has done very well for himself. His barns are full, his bins are full, his belly is full, and so are his pride and reassurance.

This man has prepared for the future. AARP would be proud of him. He’s prepared to live forever. He’s left nothing to chance. Pause! But he has no future and he doesn’t know that. In living for things and for himself alone he has ultimately forfeited the real treasures of life that outlast us eternally.

The richest person in the world can be the poorest without love and the respect of someone. Ultimately, everything he cares about will eventually be in the hands of others.

The great irony of this parable is that the rich man has done everything right, but it is a false treasure, a fool's gold if it becomes more important than the love of God and neighbor. Too often, we hedge our bets, loving and hoarding the things of this life, not realizing or trusting in that which we have not yet experienced.

How many times have we heard all this and it's not rung that inner bell and the chasm between our present material life and the life hereafter is like an ethereal dream, only because we don't know when our time will be. The fact that we do not know when, that, of course, is godly wisdom. If we did, human nature would be in complete chaos. Original sin would abound. The meek would not inherit the earth, only the tyrants and those who knew how invincible they were would. God would not matter, only that which we would conceive as inevitable would count.

There is a principle in quantum mechanics which simply says the more you know about something the less you can know (Heisenberg). That doesn't mean we shouldn't seek to know. It's the seeking itself that is important, but I repeat, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be given unto you."

The problem with the rich fool was not that he had too much grain in too many silos but that he could not balance the books of life and he starved to death spiritually in the midst of God's abundance. He sought sustenance and security where none was to be found.

In closing, I had a thought that I found worth noting. In the revised version of the Gospel of Luke, the Greek word used for "life" is translated as soul. "You fool, this very night your soul is required of you." This leads me to believe that the opportunity to store up for ourselves the things of the soul, the things that are important and yet very much neglected, could be a missed message here but it's very important in this portion of God's word.

William Barclay says it best when he writes: "But if a man clothes his soul with the garments of honor and purity and goodness, nothing on earth can injure him. If a man seeks the treasures of heaven, his heart will be fixed on heaven; but if he seeks only the treasures of earth—some day he must say goodbye to them," for as the grim Spanish proverb has it, "There are no pockets in a shroud." Amen