

“Living Intentionally”

Sermon by Pastor Renata Eustis

August 4, 2019, Pentecost 8C

Luke 12: 13-21

**Before the sermon, I want to say a few words about the time we are living in. Since we worshiped together last week, there have been 3 mass shootings. Mass shootings of whatever number of people and for whatever reason are *not normal* and we need to keep reminding ourselves of that.**

**And in addition to the two mass shootings in the last 24 hours in El Paso and in Dayton, there was a car that drove into an anti-violence march in Milwaukee. This was a group of about 40 people, mostly African-American, family members of people who had been killed. The purpose of their march was to encourage members of their community to dispose of their guns. Thankfully, no one was hurt.**

**The details of the Dayton shooting have not come out but in El Paso, it looks like the shooter drove hours to that Walmart on the Texas border because he wanted to kill immigrants.**

**Availability of guns is an issue. Mental health resources are an issue. People of faith can and do care about both. But squarely in the middle of this terror is race-based hate—white nationalism—many would say white *Christian* nationalism.**

**This is something that we need to respond to as human beings—but it is also something we need to respond to as people who are trying to follow Jesus—as people who are trying to love God and love our neighbor—as people who understand that neighbors do not have to look like us or be born in this country.**

**In the past week, there have been some important statements from faith leaders, including our bishop, Dick Graham. I encourage you to read the statement from the Washington National Cathedral called “Have We No Decency? A Response to President Trump”. I also encourage you to read a statement called “Christians Against Christian Nationalism”. It’s been signed by many faith leaders, including our Presiding Bishop.**

**The letter from our Metro DC bishop, Bishop Graham, is different. It’s much longer and much more personal. Rather than being addressed to political leaders or the American public, this letter is for Christians who are trying to live out their faith in this turbulent and hate-filled time. It’s long and I’ve made copies of it that are in the back if you’d like one.**

**But I’d like to read a part of it. This was written before the mass shootings yesterday.**

***I’m writing out of a feeling of distress and confusion. The most recent political rhetoric in our country has gotten to be even uglier than I had imagined.***

***As he ponders the question of how to respond, he cautions against shouting back. I am aware how easily my sort of response to this situation can seem naïve and passive. My friends are suggesting that we need to read more Bonhoeffer, that we are racing toward a crisis like the one he confronted. I don’t think we are. And yet, remembering the vicious acts of white supremacy acted out in Charlottesville two years ago, with their deadly consequences and their continuing impact, I admit I could be wrong. No matter what, I believe it is time for a conscious plan for living in the world at this particular moment.***

*So I say first of all, that as people who live in America right now we need to do whatever we can to show that we believe we are all in this together. We need to look for ways to reach out to strangers and to look for allies. Between now and 2020 we need to get involved in the political campaigns of people we respect. We need to support honest men and woman running for office even if this takes us across party lines. We need to use the tools available to us to protect the weak and vulnerable. We need to speak up, gently but clearly and forcefully, when we hear people say that the American dream was intended for some people here but not for others.*

*In closing he reminds us, Yet Jesus Christ is still Lord and Savior. And we are his servants first of all. In this very world, with all its sin and evil in which even we are complicit, Jesus is at work through the Holy Spirit. We are not helpless bystanders. We have been called in baptism and set apart to be signs of God's will for all creation. We do our work in hope regardless of our immediate situation.*

**Words matter. The words of the President of the United States matter. Our words matter. The words of our faith leaders matter.**

**The Word of God matters. This Word of God responds to what is going on around us and in us but it also goes before it. This Word—most especially the Word in flesh we call Jesus—speaks to us and calls us to live in response *to him*.**

**So, after a moment of silence, I'm going to continue with an abridged version of the sermon I was originally planning to preach—because we still need this word.**

**This is a challenging story--definitely not beach reading. And it's not just the story—it's the way Jesus acts. He says, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" But Jesus is not acting very friendly—and when you get right down to it, he's judging. Maybe Jesus has a different take on what it means to be a friend—and maybe he has a different take on judging than we do.**

**We're in the 4<sup>th</sup> week of our sermon series looking at Money and our Spirits—and the connections with this Gospel text are right out there. We probably already know that greed is something to be avoided—but what else is in this story for us?**

**First, I want to take a look at the guy who comes up to Jesus. In addition to his disciples, there are lots of people following Jesus—1000s of people. His words and his actions were compelling—to a wide cross section of society. And this particular day, there's a guy who comes from a family where there is something to inherit. He's made his way up to Jesus and he's close enough to raise what's most on his mind—getting his fair share of the money.**

**This guy is so worked up about his inheritance that it's all he can think about—even in the presence of Jesus. He can't take in all that Jesus is—all that he offers. He's right next to Jesus and he's truly missing out on the experience of a lifetime.**

**This may not be normal, but I actually think a lot about what it would have been like to meet Jesus in person. I often wonder whether I would have been someone that dropped everything to follow or not—**

and I honestly don't know whether I would have. But I'd like to think that, if I had the chance to actually talk to Jesus, I would ask about something deeper than my inheritance. I'd like to think I would see the compassion and wisdom—and recognize that Jesus was no ordinary man—and that what mattered to him was worth caring about.

But if I'm honest, there are many times when I am just like this guy--so self-absorbed—focused on things that are very secondary—that I don't even see what Jesus is offering me—right now.

Jesus sees the trouble this guy is in—he sees how he is missing out on the life that is really life—life that has nothing to do with having massive amounts of stuff. So, he tells a story—a parable—that, essentially, features this guy as the main character.

There's a rich man who has a bumper crop and he comes up with a plan to build larger barns so he can store it all. Then his plan is to kick back and retire because he's got more than enough to live on for the rest of his life.

The only problem is he didn't know how short his life was going to be.

As we think about how this story might apply to us and our spiritual questions about money, is Jesus saying that it's wrong to save?

What about that other story in the Bible about bumper crops and storing them—the story of Joseph in Egypt and the 7 years of bumper crops. God gives Joseph a dream that tells him to save these crops, so that people will have food during the 7 years of famine that are coming. God *tells* Joseph to save the grain.

So, God is not against saving.

But there are some critical differences between Joseph and the rich man. Joseph is looking to God for direction. He sees God as the giver of the abundant crop. And he's looking out for the needs of others—actually for the whole country of Egypt. The grain is being saved so that everyone will have enough.

The rich man—the rich fool as Jesus calls him—is another story. This fool is just talking to himself. Instead of thanking God for the bumper crop, this guy sees it as a dilemma—how do I store it? He's thinking about the community—but not for their well-being. The value of storing it, is that in times of scarcity, he can sell it at a higher price *and make even more money for himself*.

This rich guy's focus is 100% on himself—that's what greed looks like.

The issue is not so much about making money or saving, as it is where your focus is.

I want to tell another, closer to home, parable.

There was a man—a lawyer, who worked—not for a big, fancy law firm--but for the government. He gave regularly and generously to the church and other organizations, and he constantly talked about God. And he saved.

At the end of his life, he lived in one small room. He was a single man. When he died, he left his savings to two places he cared about very much—this congregation and the University of Wisconsin. That man was Herb Turvey.

The rich fool doesn't take God, other people or even the fact that sooner or later he is going to die into account. He lives like there is no tomorrow—and for him *there will be no tomorrow*. He is going to die that night.

The Walmart in El Paso was near a shopping mall called Cielo Vista—View of Heaven. The people who went shopping yesterday had no idea of the tragedy that would meet them. Those who died had no idea that yesterday would be their last day.

Mass shootings terrorize—they make all of us afraid. But in this day and age, they make people of color and immigrants especially afraid. That fear is completely rational and understandable.

But in the context of our faith—in the context of God's word to us—I pray that we might respond to these stark reminders of our mortality differently. *I pray that we might respond with a desire to live more intentionally—with the love of God and love for God and all other people at the center.*

Jesus doesn't want us to be foolish—but he does want us to be rich. He wants us to be rich toward God—to see God as the source and center of our lives—and to experience the fullness of life that is there right now—even in the midst of the terror and hate that surrounds us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.