

Sermon
18 Pentecost—Proper 20-C
September 22, 2013
William Bradbury

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1
Psalm 79:1-9
1 Timothy 2:1-7
Luke 16:1-13

Jesus says: “You can’t serve God and Wealth.”

I believe this is as true as gravity, but most of us don’t take his word for it until the god of wealth has failed us.

Money has a powerful grip on our lives.

And why is that?

Because deep within our souls there is a program running that determines how we see money and life.

It’s called the Scarcity Program. It is the deep inner belief that we are always living in a time and place of scarcity. In spite of the fact that our refrigerators are full of food and our houses are full of stuff we are deeply anxious about not having enough.

We are anxious our money will run out or disappear. You’d think we were nomads living in the Sahara Desert, instead of upper middle class Americans living in one of the most fruitful places on earth.

The fact that most of us have a lot doesn’t matter because the Scarcity Program sees only what it expects to see. This program allows us to notice the one legged Iraqi war veteran looking for a hand-out, but it tells us not to share our spare change because we might need that money, and somehow it

wouldn't be good for him to have it—he might buy a drink with it—which is ironic since many of us use our money to buy drinks.

The Scarcity Program has to do with more than our possessions and our wealth. I experience it especially around feeling the scarcity of time. I was raised to be in a hurry, to rush from thing to thing as if my very life depended on it.

The Scarcity Program is telling me that this present moment isn't enough to live on and therefore I must get myself into the future because that's where I will find abundance and peace.

But of course this is a lie. There is never anything in the future because when the future comes it always comes as Now. So, I rush to get into the future, but when it shows up it is the Now which I must rush away from to get into the future, on and on I go, with life always out of reach. (Read anything by Eckhart Tolle to understand more deeply).

The Scarcity Program keeps us constantly on edge so that we close our hearts to life—and thus find that life closes its heart to us.

Jesus calls the Scarcity Program in today's gospel "Wealth", but I like the King James translation in which it is called Mammon. Mammon is money, wealth, possessions and all those things of this world that we grab onto instead of grabbing onto God.

Jesus says we can run the Scarcity Program our whole lives but if we do we will miss our lives.

Therefore, Jesus invites us to drop it and to instead run the Abundance Program. The Abundance Program allows us to see life as it really is—which is overflowing with life and love. Its focus is not on what we don't have, but on what we do have.

Yesterday a bunch of us took a field trip to the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Park in Woodstock, Vermont, which focuses on conservation and the stewardship of the land.

I noticed my Scarcity Program running when I learned that George Marsh, Frederick Billings, and Laurence Rockefeller were all fabulously wealthy men. I felt poor and lacking compared to these titans. Poor Ole Me.

But then the Abundance Program, which comes from the Mind of Christ, kicked in and said: experience the gorgeous sun and trees, feel the wind and listen to the birds—feel life flowing through your body and through the wonderful people you are on this trip with. It's all abundance!

Opening our heart to life from the perspective of abundance transforms everything. We find great joy in giving and sharing that abundance.

As kids the Scarcity Program tells us to be afraid if someone wants to have a piece of our Halloween candy. The Abundance Program values the joy we get from sharing candy over the joy of keeping it to ourselves.

We can't serve both God and Mammon.

We can't run the Scarcity Program which comes out of fear, and the Abundance Program which comes out of faith, at the same time.

We have to choose, moment by moment. So we pay attention to what's going on and when we notice the rising of the anxiety of the Scarcity Program to take a deep prayerful breath and release ourselves into the care of God and to once again listen to the Abundance Program running deep in our hearts every moment of our lives.

In Jesus' parable the dishonest manager uses money to get more money until he comes to see he can use money to get more life.

At the end of it all don't we all want more life instead of more stuff?

Think about the obituary that will one day be written about you.

Will it say "Ole Joe amassed some wealth, but died a bitter man who always complained about what he didn't have", or will it say "Ole Jane poured out her life for others and died in peace, a very grateful woman"?

We can't serve both God and Wealth.

It makes me think of Alfred Nobel. He began his career in Sweden as a chemist and made a fortune inventing dynamite and other explosives.

According to Wikipedia: "In 1888 Alfred's brother Ludvig died and a French newspaper erroneously published Alfred's [obituary](#). The obituary stated, "The merchant of death is dead" and went on to say, "Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday."

Alfred was upset that this was how he would be remembered so several years later he changed his will and left 94% of his wealth to create the 5 Nobel Prizes that are given each year, one of which is the prize for a person who has given herself to the spread of peace in the world.

I think Jesus' words apply to Alfred Nobel: "And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes."

By the way: If you are going to be working on your will in the near future you might want to designate something for the work of All Saints Church.

Ultimately it comes down to our view of the nature of God. If we see God as a lavish giver who pours love and life on each and every one of us, from cradle to grave, whether we are rich or poor, then we will open our hearts and pour out our life to the world—and thus find our life and peace.

This is what Jesus does—he enters our suffering and pours out life and love, even as we kill him.

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is the power that can replace the Scarcity Program with the Mind of Christ—the ability to see the abundance of God.

1 Timothy proclaims to us: “God our Savior...desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Are we willing to believe in the God of Jesus who wants to pour out life and love and salvation on everyone, everywhere, at all times and in all places?

Or shall we believe in a small God, stingy with love.

This is a matter of faith—when we believe in the God of Jesus our lives will be forever transformed.

Is Jesus saying we should be foolish with our money—no. He is saying we should be foolish with our love.