

Proper 13C (Pentecost 10) 2010

Text: Luke 12:13-21

Title: Thinking about Death

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Do you think about death very much?

Maybe you do. Maybe you've been in and out of hospitals and you've worried that next time you might not make it out again. Maybe you've lost many family members and friends and that's made you think about your own death. Maybe you've just lived a long life, and you wonder how much time you've got left.

Maybe you don't think about death a lot. Maybe you go through life as though you're going to live forever, and don't worry at all about when death will come. Or when you see or hear about other people dying, you think that you've still got a long time before you have to worry about it.

But death will be a reality for all of us. And what we think about death will have a profound influence on how we live our lives each day.

The man who comes to Jesus in our gospel lesson, and the man in Jesus' story aren't too worried about death; they've both got bigger issues.

For the first man, there is the issue of an inheritance. He and his brother had obviously been arguing over how to divide the family estate. Most likely, the father of the two brothers had just died, and now it was time to divide the property.

Instead of drawing them together, the death of their father was pulling them apart. Greed had set in. The most important thing for them was the inheritance. And they were each trying to get as much as they could for themselves.

Their father's death should have helped these two brothers to put things into perspective. Their father's death should have led them to realize that they too were mortal and could die at any time. Their father's death should have given them a reason to repair their relationship, to come together, and to put aside their petty squabbling over insignificant things like money.

But it didn't. It just gave them one more thing to argue about.

Rather than get sucked into their argument, Jesus tells a story to help the man realize how twisted his perspective had become, and how backwards his priorities were.

Jesus tells the story about another man who was only focused on money and possessions.

Jesus tells the story of a farmer with a bumper crop. He had a bountiful harvest, and he didn't know what to do with all of his newfound wealth.

This farmer was so self-centered, he decided to keep everything for Himself. He didn't share with His neighbors or His family or those in need. He didn't give a donation to the local food pantry. He didn't return a portion to the Lord, and give his firstfruits back to their creator. Instead, He built bigger barns to hold it all. He had his nest egg. He had enough to retire. He maxed out his IRA. He could relax, take it easy and focus on enjoying His life. Throw a big party. Travel, spend time with the kids and grandkids. Do whatever he wanted.

But the problem was that everything was centered on himself. It was all about me, me, me.

That's the very definition of sin- to be self-centered, to be curved on in yourself, to put your wants and desires first.

That self-centeredness will show itself in many different ways. For many of us it is greed. We are a very materialistic culture. We put tremendous value on stuff.

St. Paul lists other places where our self-centeredness manifests itself: sexual immortality, impurity, passion, evil desire along with covetousness. These are things we are prone to. This is what our lives look like when we put ourselves first. And this is idolatry. We worship things, we worship ourselves, and we turn our backs on God and our neighbor.

And that's a problem when death comes around.

Nothing will be able to stop death. You can't buy death off, your money does you no good. You can't bargain with death. None of your stuff will be able to save you from death. And you certainly can't do it on your own. You can't convince death that since you've been such a good person you deserve to live longer. You can't do anything to stop death from coming.

And so when death comes, the only thing that matters will be how things stand with you and God. Are you rich in the things of God, or are you rich in the things of man?

The farmer in the story was a fool. To all his neighbors he seemed like a genius. He had a great farm, he was prosperous, he had a retirement plan, he was all set. But in the eyes of God, he was a fool. Everything that he had accomplished in life was utterly worthless.

Solomon recognized this when he wrote Ecclesiastes. It's utter foolishness to spend your life accumulating things that you can't keep, that will just go to someone else when you die. It's like trying to catch the wind and store it in a bottle. It can't be done. Just as the wind can't be held on to, so your possessions can't be held on to.

St. Paul recognized this, too. He wrote to the Colossians, and to you too, don't set your minds on the earthly things, but the things of God, the things in heaven, the spiritual things. These are the things that last. These are the things that are really important.

Even more, Paul says that you should live your life as though you had already died.

Death has a way of reminding you what is really important. Death has a way of clearing your vision, so you see what is valuable and what will last, and what will fade away. But you don't

have to wait until you are lying on your death-bed to have this new perspective. You don't need to wait until the last minute.

The fact is, you have already died. Your old, sinful self has been put to death, drowned in your baptism and every day through repentance. You've left this old way of looking at the world behind.

God has set you free from your enslavement to yourself and your desires.

When people look at death apart from Jesus Christ, they have no hope. All they have is themselves, and so all that is left is to make the most of this life until you're gone. Eat, drink and be merry. "It's better to burn out than to fade away."

And then when the end comes, all that's left is remorse for all the mistakes that have been made, and the opportunities that have been wasted.

But it's not that way for you. When you look at death, you have hope. You are rich not in earthly things, but in heavenly things. You have a treasure stored up in heaven that will never perish or spoil or fade.

God has freely given you the treasures of salvation, won for you on the cross, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He delivers them to you right here every week in the Divine Service, through the words of absolution and gospel, and through the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

No matter how you came here this morning, you will leave rich, wealthy, prosperous. Not rich in the worthless earthly things that don't last, but rich in the heavenly things, the things of God, the things that truly matter and will last beyond death itself.

Because you're so rich, you have a different view of your possessions. You can use them well in service to your neighbor, not by hoarding them in barns, but in giving them away. You can give to back God joyfully, not reluctantly, knowing that He's already given you His kingdom, His Son, riches beyond number in heaven.

There's a freedom here. There's a freedom in not being focused on yourself and accumulating stuff, because you know that you everything is all set.

And you can look forward to death as the gateway to something better.

Death will not be the loss of your life, because you've already died anyways. You've been crucified and buried with Christ. You have a new life through His resurrection.

Death will not be a disconnection from your friends and family, because you're connected to Christ, and if they're connected to Christ, too, nothing can break that connection, not even death itself.

So it's not a bad thing to think about death. In fact it can be a very good thing. Because death helps you realize how foolish you are when you make your stuff the focus of your life, death

points you to Christ and His death for fools just you, and death reminds you that one day you will be set free from all your sinful foolishness, when you will spend all your days in worship and praise of your God and Savior.