

Rappahannock Christian Church – 08/01/10
Dr. Kenneth Wilbur

Communion Meditation

A few years ago we had a guest preacher with us for Homecoming: Peter Morgan, who was then the President of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. He commented on the appropriateness of our round communion table, since no one can stand at the "head" of the table. It is Christ who is the Head. It is He who invites us to come and dine with him -not the minister, not the Elders, not even the Church -but Christ himself.

We, then on Christ's behalf, invite not just a few, but all of you, his followers, to come to the table!

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 - For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Tyrants or Tools?

Luke 12:13-21 – Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Think for a moment about what you own.

I used to visit one of our members (no longer living) -Juliet Parker- who lived down at the river. How she loved that river and marsh by her house! But she often remarked, "You know, I don't really own this place. I'm just taking care of it for a little while." She had a good and wise understanding of what we really mean when we say we "own" something.

In life, what do possessions represent? How important are they? For some, life is a competition. I saw a bumper sticker once that read, "The one with the most toys when he dies wins." Is that really the meaning and purpose of our lives? To acquire, and claim that we own, the most or the best?

Heavy winds and rain earlier this week brought down a bunch of trees in Richmond. I saw the destroyed cars and porches on the news. One guy who was interviewed was typical of what you see in situations like that. "I'm just glad my family and I are alive," he said. "The house, the car - they're just things. They're not that important!"

Here in Luke 12 we have some teachings of the Lord Jesus about possessions and possessing.

A man demanded of Jesus, "Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!" As you may know, in ancient Israel it was commanded in the Law of Moses that the eldest son in the family inherit the estate. It was not lawful for the father to divide it any other way. Now, the eldest son could, out of the kindness of his heart, divide the inheritance up so that his brothers and sisters got some. But he didn't have to. Apparently, in the case of this anonymous man, the brother didn't do this.

This encounter becomes a springboard for Jesus to tell a parable and to address the whole issue of money, possessions and ownership. The parable is about a successful farmer who built bigger and bigger barns. The key to understanding Jesus' point comes at the end, when he tells everyone plainly what he is getting at: "This is how it will be for anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Jesus frequently talks about money and possessions. Most of the time it is to warn people about the dangers that lie in the pursuit of wealth.

- "Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth (where moths and rust can ruin it), but store up for yourselves treasure in heaven."
- When Jesus was standing in the temple precincts he saw a poor widow putting a little copper coin in the offering box. The rich folks had put in lots more, but Jesus said that the poor widow had offered much more than all the rest because her offering represented sacrifice.
- Some people were angry when the "sinful" woman poured expensive perfume on Jesus' head, but Jesus said it was ok, and that she had done "a beautiful thing" for him.
- Remember the parable of the rich man and Lazarus?
- And there was the rich young ruler who asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to go and sell his possessions and give the money to the poor and come and follow him. The man "went away" sad because he had many possessions. In that moment he was forced to realize and admit that his possessions were so important to him, they were even more important than a seat in the Kingdom of God!

At the same time, we also notice that the disciple, Judas, is the "treasurer" of Jesus' band of followers. People evidently contributed to his cause, and Judas was the keeper of the purse! Peter, who has "left everything" to follow Jesus, owns a home in Capernaum. Who was it who provided the rock-hewn tomb for Jesus to be laid in after the crucifixion? A *wealthy* man! And, of course, later in the story of the church we find the Apostle Paul collecting money for the relief of the mother church in Jerusalem, which has fallen on hard economic times.

So, when we take ALL of the evidence into account, I don't believe we can rightly say that Jesus thought of money or possessions as being *inherently* evil. The issue, for Jesus, is WHO is doing the possessing? You see, sometimes possessions can do the possessing! They can rule a person's life and dictate his thinking and actions. They can begin to take over control. They can tyrannize! Do you remember when Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters"? What were the two *masters*? God and *money*! That's the danger Jesus warned people about. The pursuit of

wealth can shut out all other concerns and eliminate all other priorities. It can cause us to discard all of the ethical and moral rules -even the simple values of compassion and decency!

OR, possessions can be valuable tools that enable us to accomplish God's work. They can be a great blessing!

Jesus' parable cuts to the heart of this issue. To the man who said, "I know what I'll do, I'll build bigger and bigger barns for myself, and then I'll spend my time indulging myself -I'll eat and drink and be merry," God says, "You fool! This very night your life (soul) will be demanded of you!" There was not a person standing there listening to Jesus' words who would not have thought to himself, "Ooooo! That's certainly not what God has told us our lives are supposed to add up to!"

One day, life will be over. What will God think of the lives we have lived? Will God be pleased? Or will we have lived our lives selfishly, building bigger and bigger barns (probably at someone else's expense), with no thought for others, no thought for God?

God has entrusted us with several different kinds of currency -time, energy, ability, money and possessions. I hope that we can say, at the end of our lives, that we have spent it all well!

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you: the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. ~ **Numbers 6:24-26**