

Hosea 11: 1 - 11  
Colossians 3: 12 – 17  
Luke 12: 13 – 21  
11 Pentecost Proper 13

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July 31, 2016

### **“Does Everybody Like More?”**

I have watched a fair bit of television this month, following the Tour de France. In addition to seeing wonderful images of the French countryside, I have endured many, many commercials. One sticks in my mind. Two men are building sand castles at the beach for and with their children. One guy talks of getting more from his auto insurance company. As he explains all this he builds a sand castle that makes the mansion on Downton Abbey look like a beach shack. At one point, the other guy says, in a matter of fact way, “Everybody likes more.” In light of our Gospel reading this morning, I wonder if that statement is really true. Does everybody like more?

Our entire economy seems to be based on that notion. We are a nation of jumbo shrimp, of super-sized portions, of extras, of all you can eat restaurants, and the great tag line of late-night TV commercials, “But wait, there’s more.” We are urged, from our birth, to want more, seek more, earn more, and definitely spend more. We increase our food portions only to throw away record amounts of food. We build ever bigger homes yet our families grown smaller. We once encouraged children to share and share alike but now the mantra is mine, all mine. We have TV’s that show ever larger pictures of ever more channels and we still grouse that, “there’s nothing on.” Some of us are so old we can remember party line telephones and no, that did not mean the phone told you where a party wasgoing on when you picked up the receiver – it meant you shared a phone line with several neighbors. Today, everyone carries a phone and a camera and a computer with them at every waking moment but no one uses these devices to make or receive phone calls. As we all get more, are we any happier with the more we got? If wealth and possessions are markers of personal joy, more of us should be deliriously happy all the time and yet it seems like we are in a national depression with doom and gloom all around us and worse to come tomorrow. When we claim that everybody likes more, I suspect we are not talking about more fear, more anger, more hatred, more violence, and more death. When we say, everybody likes more, we have only some things, some activities, some outcomes, in mind. Some forms of more nobody wants or likes. Some forms of more some people want or like. A few forms of more everybody likes. There is a world of difference among these forms of more.

Jesus tells the crowd a parable. Parables are not lectures; parables are not recipes for behavior. Parables are puzzles to be worked on because they reveal the complexity and mystery of human existence. In a time when most people lived on the edge of true starvation, being rich enough to have more crops to store for the bad times is a dream come true. It is like that moment when the publisher’s clearing house media team shows up with your million dollar check. Everybody likes more and in the world of the starving, needing to build a bigger barn is total success. So what did this man do wrong? What miscalculation did he make? His land produced abundantly, he harvested his crops in time, and he now gets to relax and enjoy the fruits of his labor. He gets to live happily ever after.

Some years ago, in one of the high tech boom times in Silicon Valley, I read about a young man who started his own company. He worked incredibly hard for a number of years to build his company, taking no time off, working insane hours, by living on soft drinks, Cheetos and pizza. But one fine day, he sold the company for millions of dollars and bought a hot new Ferrari to celebrate and, driving over to the coast, lost control of his sports car, and crashed into a deep ravine, and died a millionaire at the wheel of his shiny new Ferrari. Everybody wants more.

The miscalculation our rich man makes can be seen in his use of pronouns. He talks confidently of his land, his crops, his barns, his grain, his goods, and, yes, even his soul. None of this is really his. He is not the true creator of these things; he is the end user of these things. He is the steward of these things and will, one day, perhaps sooner than he plans, give it all back to the one and only Creator.

So, should we then not want anything? Should we discipline ourselves to live on air alone? Should we fear ourselves and our desires? Is hatred of our physical selves the Way of Jesus? Should we be like Francis of Assisi, strip off all our clothes and go naked into the world?

How can we be rich toward God – as Jesus urges the crowd to be? How can we seek the things that are above as Paul urges his followers to do? How can we be renewed – made new – in knowledge according to the image of our Creator God?

We begin when we become extremely careful in our use of possessive pronouns. Almost nothing in this world is exclusively ours. We own almost nothing. We have it all on loan for the length of our human lives and we will be asked for an accounting of all that we have been given. For example, Saint Barnabas is not my church; you are not my congregation; that's not my chair; it's not my office; it's not my parking place. I serve as the sixth rector of Saint Barnabas and there will be a seventh rector and beyond – with God's help. Now, it is my sacred duty to serve through leadership all the time I have that responsibility. One day, it all goes back to the congregation and I will leave with empty hands – empty hands but an overflowing heart and mind, filled with rich, rich memories to sustain me all the remaining days of my life. And I hope that you all will have good memories as well. I have come to realize that this transition is really a dress rehearsal for what life itself is.

For life itself is a sacred duty to serve, as best we may, the people and organizations we choose. We give freely of our gifts – please note that they are called gifts because we did not make them completely on our own – we take our more and combine it with the more that others have and we create – in our own limited human way – as God creates – something new and wonderful to be enjoyed by all. We plant, we weed, we water, we wait, we pray, we endure, and we share in the abundance of our lives because it increases our more as it increases the more of others. Some of our more might stand for years to come – or not – for we are not in charge of all that happens; but, if we are fortunate, some of the more we do will nurture others in the years to come. Some of us will plant vines whose wine we will never drink, but others will. And some of us will make mistakes and others will learn from our mistakes and avoid them – perhaps.

And then, one day, a day we cannot identify ahead, it will all go back to the source of all life. We will leave this world as we came in – naked, with empty hands, slightly bewildered and

amazed. But we will leave, if we have lived richly toward God, with hearts and minds filled with memories of those we have loved. And they will have equal if not greater memories of us.

Everybody likes more. But the more our souls desire is more God – deeper God, closer God. With God, there is always more – even to the end of the age. In God, there is always more; through God there is always more. God is more, and everybody likes more. Amen.