

Things Above
Colossians 3:1-11 Luke 12:13-21

Paul opens his letter to the Colossians in chapter 1 trying to combat the Gnostic heresy. Gnosticism argued that the earthly body, the physical stuff of life, is not important. What's important, the Gnostics said, is the spiritual. And that we can achieve a higher spiritual state and uncover the hidden meaning of scripture by achieving a secret wisdom.

Now, in chapter 3, Paul is saying that we need to "seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated, at the right hand of God." Hmmm. Which is it? Do we need to be aware of the Christ that is within us and made real in the world through us, or do we need to be aware of the Christ and things that are above, in heaven, at the right hand of God?

You probably know what I'm going to say, right? Both. I could just say "Amen" and sit down now, but I will go on.

We seem to have two extremes...You are probably aware of the old saying about the person who is "too heavenly minded to do any earthly good". In our Offertory Thought this morning, Luke 12:13-21, we have the exact opposite – someone who is too earthly minded to do any heavenly good. The parable is about a man who is interested only in what he can store for himself, only in the wealth that he can build up and how he can get more of it.

What does this guy propose to do with all of his money - with all of his grain? We don't know - and he probably doesn't know either. The scripture says that he just wants to store it, that he just wants to build up more and more so that at some point he doesn't have to worry about anything anymore.

His plan to accomplish this, however, has a flaw. It's not just the lesson that Jesus draws, that storing up treasures for oneself is a fool's bet. The flaw is his actual, physical plan. "I've got all this grain in some barns. But the barns are full, and I still have grain to store.

What shall I do?...I know – I'll tear down the barns with the grain in them, and then build some bigger barns over here, and then move all the grain into those bigger barns and still have room for more grain!"...Do you see the problem with that plan?

Well, yeah – why not just leave the grain in the barns where it is and build another barn or two? But no, the Bible says his plan was to pull down his barns and then build larger ones. In the meantime, while the larger barns were being built, I assume the grain would just sit there on the ground where birds or animals could eat it, or where rain would cause it to mold and rot, or who knows what else could possibly happen to it. Does that sound like a good plan?

The lesson that Jesus draws from this parable is that even when we are storing up treasures for ourselves, we must be rich towards God. We've probably heard this, or something like it, in hundreds of offertory thoughts. However, this morning, let's look at Jesus' conclusion in a slightly different way: focusing too much on earthly/worldly things makes you dull, foolish, - prone to making bad choices.

Think about the context of this parable in the Bible. This parable doesn't stand alone; Jesus is using it to answer a question. "Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.'"...So, Jesus may be responding directly to just the person who asked that question, or possibly, the brother may have been in the crowd as well, so Jesus may be speaking to both. Either way, the answer is kind of the same – In order to answer this earthly/worldly family inheritance question, you need to know what is truly important:

-Is the money more important than the relationship? Is the material thing, the money, more important than the spiritual thing, the relationship?

-And then, of course, the broader application to those of us that may be in different situations: is the money (earthly) more important than God (spiritual)?

The guy tearing down his barns to build bigger barns, is too earthly minded to be any heavenly good. That's not the kind of person that Paul was writing to in Colossians 1 – the Gnostics. Paul was calling us to remember that Christ is in us, and that each person that we meet is made in the image of Christ. Paul was telling us to make God's kingdom real, as real as we can anyway, right here on earth. Paul was telling us that the earthly, the physical matters, the physical counts. It isn't all about secret wisdom and secret knowledge.

In Colossians 3, Paul reminds us that the same thing is true in the other direction. It's not all about the physical. It's not all about our sensual desires. It's not all about our physical wants...Our physical wants are supposed to be grounded in our spiritual beliefs, in our faith.

Paul is not saying that when we set our minds on the things that are above that the things on earth don't matter. Paul is saying that when we set our minds on things that are above it will inform us how to rightly respond to things on earth – so we will make good choices.

Paul says, if we set aside our earthly passions, like lust and greed and evil desires, if we avoid anger and rage and malice, and instead set our mind on heavenly values - if we set our minds on Christ - then we will be clothed in righteousness. Then we will be closer to the kingdom of God, a kingdom in which there is neither Greek and Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free; but a kingdom where Christ is all and in all.

Focusing on the heavenly does not mean we ignore the earthly. Focusing on the heavenly helps us to pay greater attention to the earthly, and helps us to make better decisions – in our jobs, our hobbies, our spending, our families, and our very lives. When we seek the things above, we do better for ourselves and for others here below. Amen.

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