

Greater Hartford Conference, New England Synod, ELCA
Pericope Study for Sunday, August 4, 2013 – Lectionary 18C
 Presented Tue 7/30/13 by Richard Burgess

Collect / Prayer of the Day (ELW)
 Benevolent God, you are the source, the guide, and the goal of our lives. Teach us to love what is worth loving, to reject what is offensive to you, and to treasure what is precious in your sight, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Collect / Prayer of the Day (LBW)
 Gracious Father, your blessed Son came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world. Give us this bread, that he may live in us and we in him, Jesus Christ our Lord. (90)
 or
 Almighty God, judge of us all, you have placed in our hands the wealth we call our own. Give us such wisdom by your Spirit that our possessions may not be a curse in our lives, but an instrument for blessing; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (91)

Suggested Sermon Titles (Use at your own risk.)	Eccl	Col	Lk
Life Sucks (or not), and Then You Die	X		X
You Can't Take It with You—But You Can Leave It to a Fool	X		
Eat, Drink, & Be Merry—Is That All There Is?	X		X
You Are Dead to Sin, So Why Do You Keep Sinning?		X	
Hidden in Christ		X	
Whose Soul Are You?			X
It's Only Money			X



“rich fool” – Jim Janknegt
http://www.rejesus.co.uk/site/module/jim_janknegts_rich_fool/
 The web site has several articles and videos on the making of this “icon”.

Lesson I: Eccl 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23 (NRSV)

^{1,2}Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

¹²I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem, ¹³applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with. ¹⁴I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

^{2,18}I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me ¹⁹— and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. ²⁰So I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labors under the sun, ²¹because sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. ²²What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? ²³For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity.

2.18-21 Compare this to Lk 12.20.

2.18 *toil*: Heb *amal* “toil, labor, work”, but with slightly different vowel pointing can also mean “wretched, distress, trouble”.

2.21 *This also is vanity and a great evil*. These are strong words, even bitter or despondent.

“While the theology of the book is pessimistic, sometimes cynical, almost fatalistic, the one thing that Teacher does not advocate is suicide.” (Klein, “Studies on Old Testament Texts from Series C”, <http://fontes.lstc.edu/~rklein/Documents/pentcost.htm#Pentecost10>)

A lot is written off to “vanity” in this passage: wisdom, toil, pain, work, knowledge, skill, legacy, etc. Is this nihilistic? Ecclesiastes does take a more positive note later in the book, but what care must be taken when only this portion is read?

Vanity: How is this passage transformed if by vanity one means not a bitter waste but not of worth worrying about, ie, not as a futile frustration but as a liberating lightness?

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

1.2, 12-14; 2.18-23 Why is this pericope chopped up the way it is?

1.2 *vanity*: “*hebel* denotes a breath, empty of substance and also transient”. (Nelson, “Text Studies”)

1.12 *the Teacher*: Heb *qoheleth*; “one who gathers or assembles” (a congregation or class), hence a preacher or teacher.

1.12; 2.18 “I . . . when king over Israel . . . hated all my toil . . .” Most kings don’t toil much. Is there some cognitive dissonance or even disingenuousness here?

Lesson II: Colossians 3:1-11 (NRSV)

³So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). ⁶On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. ⁷These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. ⁸But now you must get rid of all such things — anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. ¹¹In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

3.3 *your life is hidden with Christ in God* What does it mean to have one's life "hidden"? "Hidden with Christ in God"?

3.5, 8-9 Is there a significant difference between these two lists of sins?

3.5 *greed* Note the connection to this week's Gospel.

3.2-3 *Set your mind . . . for you have died . . .* This would seem to say that because of our new life in Christ we no longer need to sin. This has not been my reality, nor that of my patients and parishioners. I suppose that's some of the "already but not yet"ness so common in Pauline thought.

3.11 "what has been negated in baptism is not

the existence of such contrasting groups.

Rather these contrasts no longer serve as the prime identity of people's separateness" (Carlson, "Working Preacher" 2013, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1740)

3.11 *Scythian* A nomadic people from the north, known for their cruelty and barbarism.

3.11 "Whereas in 1 Corinthians 15:28 Paul is making a statement of future eschatological reality in terms of God being the everything in everything, here the author of Colossians is making a statement about the present reality of believers in terms of Christ being all and in all. This reflects his own distinctive theological perspective that what Paul understood to be part of the future (our being raised with Christ and God being the ultimate reality), this author understands happened in the past (resurrection with Christ) and the present (Christ being the ultimate reality)." (Carlson, "Working Preacher" 2013, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1740)

1Cor 15.28 "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all." (NRSV)

Gospel: Luke 12:13-21 (NRSV)

^{12.13}Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." ¹⁴But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." ¹⁶Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' ¹⁸Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' ²⁰But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

2.13 Note the attempt of the person in the crowd to triangulate Jesus between himself and his brother.

2.15 *life* Gk *zōē* "life".

12.16-19 Note that the rich man does nothing illegal, unethical, or even greedy. He is foolish, not evil.

12.16-17 *The land of a rich man produced abundantly* but the man calls them "my" crops. Whose abundant crops are they?

12.19 *soul* Gk: psyche; "breath, principle of animal life, life"; corresponds to Heb *nephesh*.

12.20-21 "Jesus—upon whom the Father looks and says, "This is my beloved Son"—is the only rich man in the world; we, who spend our whole lives in the pursuit of wealth, come in the end only to the poverty of death. And we complain bitterly, unable to make head or tail

of such a cruel reversal. But in Jesus—who made his grave with the wicked in their moral poverty and with the rich man in the death of all his possessing—all the pointless pursuing and all the sad incomprehension is turned to our good. He waits for us in our deaths. Quite literally, there is nothing we need to do except die." (Capon, *The Parables of Grace*, p 83.2)

12.20 *fool* Gk: *aphrōn*; "without thought; mindless". (Compare to Hannah Arendt's characterization of Adolf Eichmann as being not so much evil as "without thought".)

12.20 *the things you have prepared, whose will they be?* Compare this to Eccl 2.18-21.

Note that the rich man is not directly criticized for his greed or for not sharing his wealth. He is criticized for relying on material possessions for his security. What about indirectly? In a limited good culture, his lack of thought for others would probably come up in the listeners' minds.

How do you feel about talking about money with your congregation? What are the current issues about money that will / may / should come up?

Who in your congregation is the most likely candidate for "the rich fool"? "Poor but wise"? What do you need to say to each of them?

"Is my life worthwhile?" is for many a fearful question. It is no answer to moralise and command. Ultimately the answer is an act of healing. People need preaching which identifies the pain very clearly - and gently - and offers healing." (Loader, "First Thoughts", <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/LkPentecost11.htm>)

The David Lose article for "Working Preacher" for 8/1/10 has several links to articles on preaching about money. They are after the end of his commentary: http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=720.