

Proper 13 – Year C (04 Aug 13)
Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23
Psalm 49:1-11
Colossians 3:1-11
Luke 12:13-21

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“And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’” When was the last time any of us said anything to our soul? Like the rich man, would we tell ourselves to take it easy after accumulating enough goods to enjoy the rest of our life? What does it mean to speak to your soul?

Today’s lessons tell the story of two men. The Teacher from Ecclesiastes was king over Israel, and “applied [his] mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven,” and he “toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill.” Then, he found it all to be vanity, vanity of vanities!

In the gospel lesson, the rich man, whose land produced abundantly, wondered what to do for he had no place to store his crops. So he decided to pull down his barns and build larger ones, giving himself a place to store all of his grains and goods. To this, he concluded he would have ample goods to relax, eat, drink and be merry.

Both of these men were well off. The Teacher was a king and had devoted his life to wisdom. The man from the parable was rich and owned much land and many barns. But there is a difference between these two men. And the difference is how they viewed death.

The Teacher from Ecclesiastes was completely immersed in thinking about death. He hated that all of his toil would be left to those who came after him. Others would enjoy the fruits of his wisdom and knowledge, and become masters of all that he had worked for. He saw that in the brevity of his own life

that toil for only his own benefit was vanity. Perhaps, he even lamented in the words of the Psalmist,

“For we see that the wise die also; like the dull and stupid they perish and leave their wealth to those who come after them.

Their graves shall be their homes for ever ...

Even though honored, they cannot live for ever; they are like the beasts that perish.”

However, the rich man from the parable gave no consideration to death. At the sight of his abundant harvest, he wonders how he will preserve the fruits of his labor. Instead of seeing labor and work as a joyful response to God’s good gifts, the rich man ponders how his labor will bring him total satisfaction. His work and thoughts were all toward his own future relaxation and comfort. In his work, he hoped to give his life meaning. But this meaning he sought can only be found in God.

What does it mean to think about death? And a spoiler alert: someday we will all die.

But as Christians, we proclaim that we have already died through our baptism. Not only is Baptism the initiation into Christ’s Body the Church, but it is also our death to our previous life – for, in the words of Paul to the Colossians, we “have been raised with Christ” and our new life is “now hidden with Christ in God.”

In our baptism liturgy, we ask God, “that all who are baptized *into the death* of Jesus Christ [his] Son may live in the power of his resurrection” (BCP, page 306). And also, in the thanksgiving for the water of Baptism, we recognize

in that water that “we are *buried* with Christ in his *death*.” Our baptism is simultaneously a celebration of death and new life.

But what does it mean to be dead while still alive?

Death exposes the brevity of our lives and the absurdity of certain behaviors – behaviors that are common to us all. Baptized people, Christians, are the walking dead, although we can easily forget it. We wear the same clothes and same shoes of those of other faiths or no faith at all. We have similar careers. We live in the same neighborhoods. Yet we are called to be a people who think about death everyday, to wear it on our bodies, and live into that death everyday while we are still alive. How does that change the way we see and interact with other people? And why does it matter to think about death at all?

It matters because, like the Teacher in Ecclesiastes, we find out what we are toiling over and death tells us what is really important.

Next week, we will have a baptism at Calvary during the 9am Garden Service. Someone new will join us in this death. They will stand before us and renounce evil and turn to Jesus. Then, together we will all renew our baptismal covenant in the words of the Apostles’ Creed before they are baptized in the name of the Triune God. What does this mean? We are initiating people into a body, specifically into a group of people dedicated to seeing life differently because we have already died.

For when you have died with Christ and been raised with him, it does not matter what shoes you wear or the clothes you buy or the size of your barn or the depths of your wisdom. Death evens us out. Our baptism means that we are

raised to new life, a new life where people who have no seemingly good reason to be together, now belong together and to each other—dead, yet alive.

Returning to the two men, what if we put the Teacher and the Rich Man in the same room together. What is the difference between the two? One has thought about death, and the other has not even considered it.

By storing up goods for only his own future, the rich man was not able to consider his own mortality. But in our baptism, being raised with Christ and being revealed with him in glory, we are united. For “in that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free.” To be rich toward God, then, is to see our life – and our death – in light of the one who “is all and in all,” Jesus Christ. AMEN.