

1 August 2010
Pentecost 10

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Relax, Eat, Drink, and Be Merry . . . at The Feast Which Has No End”
Text: Luke 12:13-21; Colossians 3:1-11 (Ecclesiastes 1-2)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

When you wake up in the morning and look in the mirror, what do you see? It's not a pretty picture, is it! Your hair is probably all matted down on one side and sticking up on the other. Your eyes are puffy, your beard has grown out, maybe you have creases across your face from your pillow or sheet. We don't want other people to see us that way - and so we shower, fix our hair, shave, put on make-up, dress nice. Got to be presentable.

Well this morning here in church, we look into the mirror of the Word of God, and what do you see? *There is a rich fool looking back at you.* The rich fool of the Holy Gospel. The rich fool who was concerned only for himself. The rich fool whose heart was full of covetous desires. Yes, he is the Old Adam that lives inside each of us. The old sinful Adam we want no one else to see. But there he is, looking at us in the mirror this morning. And it's not a pretty sight.

Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

In the Large Catechism, Luther said that the last two commandments, on coveting, are not given for the cheaters in the eyes of the world. For those who sin is obvious. For those whose sin we all can see. For those we *know* are wicked rogues. No, he says, these commandments are for the most pious folks; for those who want to be praised and to be called honest and upright people. *For people like you and me.* To show us that while we may dress ourselves up and look like “good Christians” on the outside - our hearts are not so good. In fact, they are filled with all kinds of sins, desiring and coveting what we want, even if we make what we do look good and legitimate, honest and upright, on the outside.

And so these commandments against coveting are not only designed to protect our neighbor, they are also to protect us. For that which we desire to have, that we covet, that which we chase after - whatever it may be - is our god. And that's why Jesus calls that rich man a “fool” - it's not just that he acted *foolishly*; in the Scriptures, that's a word always connected to **unbelief**. That's why Paul, in his letter

to the Colossians this morning, calls covetousness **idolatry**. It is to put on the throne of our hearts someone or something other than the true and living God. And that, Solomon reminds us this morning, is vanity.

A lot of the time, or most of the time - as in the parable Jesus told today - that false god is money or possessions. There's something about money that makes us crazy, that makes us suspicious of others, and that makes us look at others as in competition with us and so robs us of the joy of life. That's what happened to the man in the Gospel with the inheritance problem. He didn't even seem to care that this inheritance had caused a rift between him and his brother - he just wanted his share . . . and he wanted Jesus to get it for him.

But Jesus wants to give him more than that. Much more.

But it's not just money. We can covet and desire all kinds of things in our hearts that make us treat others not as persons for whom Christ died, but as persons to satisfy us, putting yourself on the throne of your heart. And once you do that, what happens? You get angry when you don't get what you want. You get indignant when you don't get the special treatment you think you deserve. You want admiration and recognition from those you so graciously decide to help. And when you don't get these things you covet, even in quite little matters, a great ugliness can rise up from your heart. The sin within you spewing out and poisoning your relationships, your homes, and your life.

Because truthfully, looking into the mirror this morning, you *are* that man in the parable, aren't you? I know I am. I may look nice and presentable on the outside, but in here [pointing to my heart] . . . We want to have it made. We want to be able to sit back with no worries, no problems, no bothers, and say to ourselves: *Ahhh. All is well. Relax. Enjoy.* And we want Jesus to do that for us. And so when others interfere with that, with this life that we covet - even Jesus! Bringing into our lives people who need our help, who need our love, who need our time - we don't like it. Please, don't bother the king, or the queen.

Honestly, *fool* doesn't seem a strong enough word for that, does it? Coveting doesn't get a lot of air time when talking about the commandments - like murder and adultery - but maybe it should. It's like Pandora's box. Once you open it . . .

Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

So what does your life consist of? St. Paul reminds us today: ***Christ is your life.*** He is the one who gave you your life and sustains your life. We like to take credit for what we have and what we've made of our lives, but the truth is, all that we have is

from Him. No matter how hard you work, no matter what you achieve, if He didn't give it, you wouldn't have it. And we confess this in the Creed. For when we confess: *I believe in God, the Father Almighty*, what does this mean? I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members [*my life*], my reason and all my senses [*my abilities*] and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, **and all that I have**.

And so to cling to the gifts and not the Giver truly makes us fools. For Jesus wants to give you much more than that. Much more.

So listen again to what St. Paul says - how he presents a *different* picture. ***If then you have been raised with Christ . . .*** And you have! You have been raised with Christ and given a new life with a new birth from above in Holy Baptism. If then you have been raised with Christ, ***seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*** You see, He's the one on the throne, seated at the right hand of God. ***Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*** Your life is hidden with Christ, which means that if He is on the throne in heaven, guess where you are?

You see, that's why putting yourself on the throne here, on earth and in your own heart, makes you a fool! It's not a step *up*, but a step *down*. The throne you belong on, that you have been given, and that you are, in fact, already on, is with Christ in heaven. For in your baptism, your heart with all its sin and coveting and ugliness was washed clean in forgiveness, you were joined with Christ and made a son of God, and put with Him on the throne in heaven. The man in the Gospel wanted his share of the inheritance here, but Jesus has given you His inheritance in heaven. And not just a share of it or part of it, *but all of it*. He has made you royalty, sons and daughters of the king. To covet anything else is *not* a step up, as satan wants you to think. He just wants to drag you down off that throne, to a counterfeit throne, one that cannot last.

No, Paul says. You died with Christ. You were raised with Christ. You have a new life in Christ. Set your mind on this. For though you may not look or feel like royalty right now, that reality is simply hidden. But, he says, ***when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*** Or in other words, on that day when Christ is revealed in glory, the glory that is hidden in you will also be revealed. Not *given*, but *revealed*, for He has already given that to you!

This is why Luther wrote what he did about what you should do when you wake up every morning; when you get up and look in the mirror and see the ugliness - and remember that what we see on the outside pales in comparison to the sin within -

he said make the sign of the cross. Remember who you are and set your mind above. Repent of your sin and die and rise with Christ again. Don't try to cover up that old ugly sinner in you. Don't just brush him off, clean him up, and put make-up on him - *kill him! Drown him in your baptism!* Remember that you are baptized and be raised with Christ to a new life in the forgiveness of your sins. Each morning when you rise like a little resurrection. **Putting to death what is earthly in you** - that old sinful flea-ridden throne we love so much - and be raised and renewed by Christ to His life.

And that changes everything, for Jesus' death and resurrection has changed everything. And so we live now not defined by what we do or do not have, but defined by the cross - that you are worth the life of the Son of God. That life that He gave on the cross, and that He now gives *to you* - in your baptism, in the forgiveness of your sins, and in His Body and Blood. That we be not many kings on many thrones, all in competition with each other; but that as St. Paul said: **Christ is all, and in all.**

That's where your life comes from, and where your life is. Do not be deceived. Accept no counterfeit christs or flea-bag thrones. Use and enjoy the things of this world that you have been given, yes, for what they are - but no more than that. And be generous with them, Christ-like, giving as you have been given to. For you are baptized and live in Christ, and *will relax, eat, drink, and be merry* not just for many years, but for eternity. But you do not have to wait for eternity - *come now* to that feast, which Christ has put here for you. *Come now*, to eat and drink. *Come now, lift up your hearts*, and relax and rejoice in His forgiveness and life.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.