

SERMON 799

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 29, 2013

913th Week as Priest

739th Week at St Dunstan's

4th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

CHOOSING YOUR LIFE

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

We have heard a great deal in recent weeks about money ...

You cannot serve God and Mammon, said Jesus.

Your life does not consist of an abundance of possessions.

And there is more of the same this Sunday morning ...

As for those who are rich, command them not to be haughty or to set their hopes on wealth.

And now we have the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The rich man has lived a life of ease and wealth, and he has had no regard or compassion for the plight of Lazarus, the beggar at his gate.

When they both die, Lazarus goes to heaven and the rich man goes to hell. Father Abraham, who is a kind of gatekeeper in heaven, speaks of each man's reward. The rich man deserves torment and agony and

burning in flames. The poor man now receives comfort and peace and rest with his fathers.

We can't tell from the parable if the rich man has been cruel and harsh in his treatment of Lazarus, or if he has simply ignored, overlooked, shown a complete lack of interest in his suffering. **But** surely, I think, there must be something in the rich man's treatment of others that has cost him salvation.

It is the age old question of Christianity. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Or more to the point: "**H**ow do I get to heaven, or how do I avoid going to hell?"

Getting to heaven is the chief preoccupation of street preachers, television evangelists, and revivalists. "**B**elieve, and you will be saved." "Turn your life over to **C**hrist, and you will have eternal life."

And going to hell is the principal weapon of conversion. I'm always reminded of the billboard on Interstate **65** headed to **B**irmingham: "**G**o to **C**hurch or the **D**evil will **G**et You!" It seems to convince a lot of people. Maybe Lee should use that for our message on the Red Sign next week. "**G**o to **C**hurch or the **D**evil will **G**et You!"

The problem here is that scaring people out of hell, and threatening people with the agony of flames, an eternity of suffering, and hopeless damnation, isn't really "**G**ood News" is it?

Correct me if I'm wrong, but Jesus **C**hrist did not come to earth in order to send people to hell forever. Jesus came to save sinners, I believe is what the **G**ospel says. And therefore, frightening sinners

with the certainty of hell is not really what you would call orthodox evangelism.

No, I would point to St Paul's First Letter to Timothy as an example of a still more excellent way.

Paul tells Timothy that the love of money is the root of all evil. This is not the same as saying, "Money is evil." Money is simply a tool, a means for obtaining goods and services, and nothing more. Money is useful, helpful, and even necessary, but money itself is not evil.

The love of money, however, can most certainly bring you all kinds of evil. This is idolatry, not practicality, and it deserves the name "Greed."

Paul strongly suggests that we pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. These are among the Fruits of the Holy Spirit, and they give us life—and not just ordinary, run-of-the-mill life, but what Paul calls, "the life that really is life."

This, you see, is our true aim and purpose. To take hold of the life that really is life. It may begin with a serious evaluation of your current life and circumstances. You may discover, upon reflection, that your life has been guided by selfishness and disapproval of others, rather than mercy and pity. You may come to find that with all your getting and spending you have laid waste your powers.

Instead, what is called for is a new direction, a new purpose, a very different way of living. Perhaps it's time to repent—which is precisely what Paul is suggesting. And to do it before you get to the

end of your time on this earth, only to discover that you have never really taken hold of the life that really is life.

This is what **God** has truly intended for us all, and for all this time. “I have come that you have life,” promised Jesus, “and that you have it abundantly.”

But he was not speaking of wealth; he was speaking of a life that really is life—a life of faith, a life of commitment and determination, even a life of good works and of generosity. **A**nd it is waiting for you, if you will only take hold of it. **A**MEN.

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