

Sermon Preached at the Episcopal Church of the Holy Comforter
2701 Park Road, Charlotte, NC 28209
The Third Sunday after Pentecost, June 13, 2010
Year C, Proper 6 RCL [1 Kings 21:1-10, (11-14) 15-21a;
Galatians 2:15-21; Luke 7:36-8:3]
The Reverend Scot McComas, Interim Supply Priest

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and redeemer. Amen.

Greed, selfishness, self-centeredness, lust, gluttony, covetousness, pride. What do these have in common? They are part of the human condition and everyone has experienced these at some point in life. It is also what we find in stories throughout the Bible, including the lessons today in the Old Testament and the Gospel.

In the first reading, the evil King Ahab, who covets Naboth's vineyard, is told he cannot have it and sulks like a child. Then his wife, Jezebel, who is even more evil than he is, produces a trial with false charges against Naboth, has him killed, and then seizes his vineyard. A person is murdered for a piece of property. Evil has no bounds. This is an example of putting things above people.

An example of putting decorum or protocol and a love of money above people is found in the Gospel reading. By the way, do you know which topic is written about the most in the New Testament? It is the love of money. Not money in itself, because that is just a medium of exchange. But it is the value assigned to money that is the point. People today in the twenty-first century share this sinful human condition with those in the first century and twenty centuries since. You've heard the phrase, "Money is the root of all evil." It really reads, "The love of money is the root of all evil." In fact, when clergy do pre-marital counseling and counseling during marriages, the number one topic of discussion, almost always, is money.

In today's Gospel the Pharisee is horrified that the woman is bathing Jesus' feet with ointment, making a spectacle of herself, and even more, she is one of those terrible sinners. He says, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him-- that she is a sinner." It's interesting how Jesus teaches the Pharisee a lesson using money as a guide, the lowest common denominator. Whether or not the Pharisee understood Jesus' lesson, I imagine that his ears perked up a bit when he heard the phrase 500 denarii—several year's wages.

When we love money, we usually put that in the place of something else. We might put money in place of family, friends, the law, paying our taxes, ethics

and morals, anything. We see examples in Scripture today of putting property above people, and putting reputation and money above people.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, we are reminded to “keep our lives free from the love of money, and be content with what [we] have.” [Hebrews 13:5] We are to keep a watchful eye on our ego and not to fall into the trap of valuing what our culture deems important. Instead we are to value what Christ deems important.

We are bombarded today with images of what it means to be successful. Get to the head of the line, be first, make more money, get more toys, buy a bigger and better house, and the list goes on. I am still perplexed with the term “starter house” when so many in the world live in a cardboard box or a mud hut. There is nothing wrong with wanting to do the best we can and use our God-given gifts in this world, but it is important and essential to remember that our ability and, sometimes, luck is to be used for good, not just for us, but for others. Altruism and philanthropy are good. Injustice is outrageous to God. We also find in the Letter to the Hebrews, “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” [Hebrews 13:16]

If we do not keep in mind how money can tempt us, we can fall into sin. Another temptation involves pride and the human proclivity to want to be successful. The great spiritual author and priest Henri Nouwen cautions us about success and ego. Nouwen writes about the temptation to want to be spectacular or powerful. Instead, we are called to be faithful, not successful or spectacular, and certainly not powerful.¹ Furthermore, if through our own ability or mere luck, we become successful or powerful, what a wonderful opportunity we have to share with others whose ability or luck may not be the same as ours.

We are all linked to one another. May we never forget to work for the common good and not for self alone. May we never forget to seek humility and not personal exaltation. May we “keep our lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have” and most importantly, “share what you have for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” When we do this, as our Epistle reads, “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” and in you. Amen.

¹ Henri J. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*, National Book Network, 1993.