

Proper 13, Year C
Luke 13: 13-21
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Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, CA

Someone in the Crowd:
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

“Someone in the crowd” – it often begins that way. Someone in the crowd poses a question. Someone in the crowd makes a request. Someone in the crowd that follows Jesus asks, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” Who is in that crowd that follows Jesus? Who are those listening for his answer?

Surely there are day laborers there in the crowd. Those who go from place to place in search of work, those who hunger for their daily bread. Surely they are there hanging on Jesus’ words.

I suppose some of those who lost their land because they couldn’t pay the heavy taxes Rome imposed are there. People who once had land and the security owning land can bring; people who now find themselves on the margins of their world.

We know there are women in the crowd – women who followed Jesus from Galilee. Women who provided for him out of their abundance.

I can imagine that are some standing there whose hearts feel empty – people who have somehow lost their way.

I'm sure there standing in the crowd were some mourning their dead and others bearing the burden of chronic pain.

There are children there as well – children scrambling for enough to eat, children trying to carve out a living in a world often hostile to them.

I suspect there are outsiders there – Samaritans, gentiles, all kinds of folks who found themselves on the far side of the line that divides the ins from the outs.

And then there are the curious, the on-lookers, the ones who wonder why all this fuss over a carpenter from Galilee

- people with position, place and power
- people with land to divide
- people with inheritances to squabble over
- people with an abundance of possessions

To all of them, to all standing in the crowd, Jesus issues an admonition, tells a parable, offers a teaching.

To all of them he says, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

To all of them he tells the parable of the rich fool –
a man who believed that his life consisted in an abundance of possessions,
a man suffering under the misguided notion that what he had defined who he was,
a man who lived for himself alone.

I think that parable of the rich fool is really an invitation —

- *an invitation to turn from isolating and ultimately self-destructive ways of living to a life lived in accordance with God's shalom;
- *an invitation to turn from focusing on what one has to focusing on what one has to give;
- *an invitation to turn from emptiness to fullness of life.

I wonder how those in the crowd received that invitation. I wonder how they heard that admonition. Do you suppose there were those who, on hearing Jesus' cautionary words about all kinds of greed, began to wonder what are the kinds of greed he's talking about?

Do you think they drew the fine but important distinction between greed and hunger? Did they see the connection there? Often one person's greed can lead to another person's hunger.

Jesus offers those standing in the crowd a different way of life — a way apart from greed. He says to them, "Be rich towards God." What does this mean? How can we be rich towards God?

I think richness towards God begins with the notion that we are all woven into one cloth. Martin Luther King, Jr., recognized this fundamental truth when he wrote from the Birmingham jail, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." The poet John Donne put it similarly: No one is an island; no one stands

alone. Each one's joy is joy to me; each one's sorrow is my own."

Being rich towards God means understanding and operating from a recognition of the fundamental unity of God's creation. We cannot afford to avert our eyes from human pain or suffering wherever they occur because when we do we look away from God.

Being rich towards God means living in solidarity with all of God's people. We are rich towards God when we are rich towards the children of Darfur and the children of Sonoma.

Being rich towards God requires recognizing that what we do with what we have matters both here in this community and throughout the world. We are rich towards God when we stop and assess the impact of what we do on those standing in the crowd with us – both here in this community and throughout the world – for we all wear the face of God.

Being rich towards God means living generously because that is the way God lives.

To all of us standing in the crowd, Jesus issues an invitation – an invitation to a life of richness towards God, an invitation issued again and again and again.

The envelope lies open on the table.

