

Proper 14—Year C Luke 12:32-40

“Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out...where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Do you all know the “Sky Mall” magazine that can help you make purchases while in flight? You never want to lose an opportunity to get some shopping done.

(Read one sample)

THE PEACEFUL PROGRESSION WAKE UP CLOCK. This clock gradually increases ambient light, stimulating aromas, and peaceful sounds to awaken sleepers. Thirty minutes before wake-up time, the light glows softly, brightening over the next half hour while faint aromatherapy scents release into the air. Etc. etc.

It never fails to powerfully strike me how we live in a culture which is so at variance with Jesus’ teachings on possession. If we have everything we could possibly need, we have people whose profession it is to tell us what else we need. There are more and more ways to acquire possessions also. If you don’t want to go to the store and don’t want to bother with the “Sky Mall,” you can shop on-line. I have heard that there are people who actually make a career of collecting the “freebies” from Craig’s List and selling them.

Just before our Gospel passage for today comes the famous “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.” Last week, we had the parable of the rich fool. Now we have: “Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.”

More than any of the other Gospel writers, Luke emphasizes proper use of material possessions. In the story of Jesus’ birth, Luke emphasizes the fact that the Messiah was born to poor people. Jesus’ mother is reduced to laying her newborn in a manger and the first people who pay homage to Jesus are humble shepherds rather than magi. In Matthew’s version of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Luke’s Jesus says “Blessed are you who are

poor” and later adds “Woe to you who are rich.” In Luke (and only in Luke) the first words of Jesus as he begins his public ministry are: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.” Luke seems to urge a radical attitude toward material possessions. Take Luke 14:33. In which Jesus states unequivocally “none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.” I have sometimes mentioned this particular verse in Search Programs because my own literal reading of it led me to believe convent life is the way. Now, having lived in convents for many years, I’ve come to appreciate that giving up is not just about material possessions.

“Sell your possessions and give alms.” My mentor John Claypool spent half his professional career as a Baptist Pastor and the other half as an Episcopal priest, ending up as the Rector of an Episcopal church in Birmingham, Alabama. Somehow, Claypool always was assigned to wealthy churches. He had to give much thought and prayer to how to minister to the wealthy. He never scolded or upbraided the wealthy for their money and possessions. What he did was regularly urge them to be generous with whatever they had. His parishioners in Birmingham told me about the many social service programs their church sponsored or supported.

If you’ve ever been to a third-world country like Cameroon, you know that even middle-class Americans are wealthy and poor Americans aren’t that poor. We don’t have a culture of poverty as they do in the third world. Our crippling burden is the gap between the rich and the poor. You may have all heard of William Sloane Coffin, who was senior pastor of Riverside Church in New York City. He was especially known for his concern for the poor and economic justice. He didn’t mince words. If you are interested in justice issues, I especially recommend his book *Credo*. I would like to end with a few quotes from this book.

p.57 There are two ways to be rich: One is to have a lot of money; the other is to have few needs. Let us remember that Jesus—who influenced history more than any other single person, institution, or nation—died, his sole possession a robe.

p.60 “It is not money that poisons the soul; it is being anxious about it.”

p.61 ”The primary problems of the planet arise not from the poor, for whom education is the answer; they arise from the well-educated, for whom self-interest is the problem.