

Sermon for the 10th Sunday after Pentecost (C), Proper 13, 5.viii.2007, 08:30 / 10:00
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Holy Eucharist – Missa Brevis / Holy Communion Liturgy, ELW Setting 4
Ecclesiastes 1:2,12-14; 2:18-23; Psalm 49:1-12; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and Who is to come! ✎ Amen.

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?"

And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

-- Luke 12:13-15

Greed. Fear. They are two sides of the same coin, but this coin will not spend in the Kingdom of God. Going about the business of that Kingdom, His Father's Kingdom, Our Lord is hailed by someone from the sidelines. Jesus, the powerful teacher and miracle-worker is about to become part of a human triangle, the

fulcrum a ne'er-do-well wants to use to budge his prosperous brother. God's glory is revealed in His refusal to be sucked into this trap, into taking sides over something of no ultimate importance. Jesus uses the occasion to issue a warning to all who will hear. Eyes straight ahead! Focus on the coming and everlasting Kingdom of what God's gift of mercy, not on what we think we have, should have or did have, not on the vanities of this life, passing like sand through the fingers of time.

In today's Gospel, Jesus continues forward, forward toward the Cross, toward the total loss of everything this world has to offer, toward the collision between the Kingdom of Heaven and the prince and principality of this world in which the glory of His Heavenly Father will be revealed on the Third Day. The true Church of Jesus Christ follows her Lord, *forward*, toward every the Cross without distraction, forward, *cutting through* every entanglement that does not pertain to God's reign of compassion,

over every obstacle strewn by the Devil on her path. This the Church does, where she is true to Christ, at every level of her life. In times of social crisis and change, she opens her doors to the fearful and the perplexed, just as the Lutheran Churches of East Germany did in the last days of that country's enslavement under Communism. But, though the Church never ceases to expand the circle of those for whom she lives, she never forgets her purpose. As the East German Lutheran Bishops taught, "The Church is for *everyone*, but the Church is not for *everything*."

But, the pressure on the Church to live for *everything* is very strong indeed. A political regime or worn-out social structure is failing, losing its credibility. Should the Church not help to prop the state up? No, she should not. She serves to uphold those in positions of responsibility with her prayers, responsibility they have received from God, and not to sanctify their failures to exercise that responsibility. There are those who,

their whole lives subservient or feeling inferior to others, crave the chance to dominate and control someone, *anyone*, and thus to balance the scales of justice. Should the Church not give them this chance and tolerate their petty and infantile behavior within the community of Word and Sacrament, dragging a whole congregation into the pattern of mental illness through co-dependency? This the Church must *not* do, for her Lord sends her into the world to heal and to make whole in His Name, not to become as sick as the demoniacs whose illness is so profound they see themselves as examples of health. The Church, as an institutional community, has institutional needs. Should she not spend most of her time fretting about her institutional existence and hoarding the always limited amount of financial resources available to her? If she does, she is planning for her own demise.

If we in our congregation, as a very small part of Christ's vast Church, but as a very large reality in our own lives, have

become side-tracked from pressing forward to God's Kingdom in any of the ways described above, or in other ways that may occur to you, then it is time for us to see things in sharper perspective, to view the path ahead with improved acuity through today's Gospel as this is supported also by today's First Reading and Psalm. This life for each of us, and our life in this part of the Church militant and struggling on earth, is simply too short to allow ourselves to be drawn off to the side by concerns that do not pertain directly to the Church and her mission.

Because He did not stop to adjudicate that man's complaint against his brother, Jesus was able to move on and touch the lives of many, many others that very day, perhaps including that man to whom He had to say 'No. Not now, friend.' Where the Church follows her Lord and keeps pace with Him, she, too, will not waste time being what some want her to be at the expense of being the Bride of Christ. Today our congregation's nominating committee

meets to identify new leaders in our life and mission together. May men and women be found who are themselves focused on the Kingdom of God in this place and around the world, and may they help to lead us in the year ahead to go forward toward Christ's mission for us without detour or distraction. 🌿Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to Our God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. 🌿Amen. —

S. D. G.!