

A Sermon by Larry Rawlings

July 31, 2016

SEEKERS CHURCH
A Christian Community
In the Tradition of Church of the Saviour



Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23

Psalms 90:3-6, 12-7

Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11

Luke 12:13-21

P-U-S-H is an acronym for Prayer Until Something Happens. Sadly, that something was the death of my grandfather yesterday at the age of 100. Through death, there is life, and today we will celebrate the upcoming birth of our friend Jackie's child. These things happen for a reason. It is always God's plan. It reminds me that none of us; absolutely none of us; one more time: none of us; will leave this earth alive. May he rest in peace, "Triple R's," Roland Raymond Rawlings, and welcome to Jackie's little one.

The news this summer, of course, is full of sobering reminders too, that life in this world encompasses tragedy as well good times.

Scripture and these events are sobering reminders that all that we accomplish in the world, all the success, wealth and fame is not what life is all about.

The first reading is from one of those books attributed to the wise King Solomon; the writer says he is the son of David, King of Israel; Solomon was the richest, most powerful King of God's people and ruled over what was really an empire. It is a really remarkable book, and if you read it on its own, not knowing where it came from or who wrote it, you would swear it was not from the Bible.

In a very nice way, it says eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow, some tomorrow, you will die. It also says endure misery when it comes your way; when you're sad, go ahead and be sad.

It is a wisdom book, which says that life has its ups and downs; sometimes the good suffer and the evil prosper, and sometimes the good prosper and the evil suffer. Don't try to figure it out, Solomon says. Just deal with it. Live the life you have. To that, I say "W-I-I-F-M? What's In It For Me?"

It's a good lesson. Sometimes good people are paralyzed by their misfortune and let it stop them from moving on in life. We often say "How could God let this happen to me?" And sometimes good people feel guilty if life is too good. They don't allow themselves to enjoy it.

We know about survivor guilt, which some people experience when their loved one's are tragically taken from them. That has been one of my "not Y-E-T-S." Y-E-T is an acronym for "You're Eligible Too!"

Solomon says of man "Even at night, his mind is not at rest." I know I lose a lot of sleep worrying about things. And judging by the number of sleeping pills on the market, so do a lot of others. But Saint Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God..." (*Romans 8:28*) All things! It's hard to remember that.

In his letter to the Colossians this morning, Paul puts it into perspective. "Seek what is above," he tells us. "Don't get really attached to the things of this world, because if you do they'll hold you back, weigh you down, make you lose sleep."

What we should seek, what is above, is God. And God is love. And it takes wisdom to distinguish love from liking, preferring, infatuation, and neurotic attachment.

There is a now-classic movie, one of my favorites, called "The Jerk," starring Steve Martin. It is a rags to riches to rags back to riches story.

At the point where the now rich hero is ruined and cast out of his mansion onto the streets, he collects a few things to take with him, things which he thinks he "needs."

One of the things he realizes he needs is the remote control to his TV set. The accumulation of the things of this world gives us the illusion that we are in control, and makes us focus even more on keeping control.

But that is a task at which we can never succeed. God puts us here in this world specifically to learn that we are not in control and to learn to trust in Him.

Adam and Eve's sin was that they tried to assume control. Paul tells us to put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator, in the image of Christ, who as you know, as a human being, was not in control.

He let the Father be in control, even when it hurt him badly. Faith tells us that when it really counts, God will ultimately make everything right, and will be a just judge for us and for everyone, at the right time.

In the Gospel, that man in the crowd wants Jesus to be judge for him now: "Make my brother share with me the inheritance from our Father."

Now doesn't that sound just like us. We ask all the time for a bigger share of something in this world; a bigger share of happiness, a bigger share of wealth, of health, of justice, of peace and quiet.

It is so human. And God knows that because of our weakness, we do need some of these things.

But how much is enough for us?

We are bombarded daily with messages telling us we really need some more things to be complete. Recently, when I was watching TV, I was struck by the commercials. Especially those targeting men for vanity products to make them look younger. And those ads for sleeping pills. Aging is a privilege.

Getting old is optional.

One's life does not consist of possessions, Jesus tells us, or to look younger.

In the parable Jesus relates this morning, God tells the rich landowner and us: "Be rich in what matters to God."

Last week we heard: "Seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened.

What does matter to God? What should we seek?

It's so simple, but we so often get it wrong. I spent at least 2/3 of my life getting it very wrong.

The Beatles had it almost right: "All you need is love." What they should have said, to be 100% right, is "All you need is to love."

I spent so much time looking for love, instead of spending that time loving. Love is one of things you cannot find by looking for it. It finds you if you are ready for it, and you get ready by loving others.

That is the whole law, the greatest commandment, to love God, and to love Him in and through others, our neighbors, loving them just as much as we love our own selves.

It's not easy, but Jesus makes it clear in the Gospels, it is what matters to God. And what else matters to God is us, you and me.

He loves us. He does not ask of us what he does not give. For love of us, He created. For love of us, He became one of us, suffered, and died.

For love of us, He gives us his grace to keep these commandments, and for love of us He showers us with His mercy when we fail. For love of us, he remains with us in His word and the sacraments, especially the sacrament we celebrate together this morning.

So let's really make this time together a celebration. A celebration of love, of mercy, of God's presence and of the salvation offered us by Jesus Christ. I will close with my final acronym, G-O-D: Good Orderly Direction. Amen.

