

**August 4, 2019 - Recentering On Christ**

**Given by Rev. Mattei**

[Colossians 3:1-11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+3%3A1-11&version=NrsV); [Luke 12:13-21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+12%3A13-21&version=NrsV)

My eyes feasted on many beautiful things when I was in Italy: the splendor of God’s creation, the attractive architecture, the impressive artwork. My belly also feasted on the variety of good foods and wines and the difficult choices to be made at icecream parlors. It was all intoxicating to the point that I needed to shake myself back to conscious awareness and realize I was having unrelenting attacks of greed. No matter how much good cheese I had had, there was much more for another day.

Now, Wikipedia explains: Gluttony means over-indulgence and over-consumption of food, drink, or wealth items, particularly as status symbols. In Christianity, it is considered a sin if the excessive desire for food causes it to be withheld from the needy. Some Christian denominations consider gluttony one of the seven deadly sins.

I did not over-indulge or over-consume, but I need to confess that in all cases, the splendor of the Gulf of Naples, the spirit enriching arts of the Renascence, and the exquisite food, triggered in me a sense of sadness knowing that at the end of vacation, I would not have access to all that for sometimes, that I couldn’t take it with me, that I needed to rely on photos and memory. In other words, I had a brush with greed!

Greed is the insatiable, controlling desire to want more, to grasp, to hold on to, to possess. Greed is the opposite of contentment and of living a satisfied life, being thankful for what God has provided and ready to make our resources available to others, conducting a generous life. The apostle Paul explains it to us in at least a couple of instances: Once we have put on Christ, everything else is secondary ([Phil. 3:8](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+3%3A8&version=NrsV)), and once we are raised with Christ, we learn to seek the things that are above ([Col. 3:1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+3%3A1&version=NrsV)). When we are centered in Christ, inspired and regulated by his Word, we seek God’s Kingdom and become “rich toward God” (Lk. 12:21).

The young man in today’s gospel requests that Jesus intervene in a dispute between him and his brother. He wants Jesus to reprimand his older brother for a perceived irregularity in the distribution of their father’s inheritance. Jesus does not bite. It was customary for the older brother to obtain two-thirds of the inheritance ([Deut. 21:17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+21%3A17&version=NrsV)). Jesus calls him out on his greed and speaks in parables. Greed can make one do and say foolish things, behaving unwisely towards others and God in the distorted and corrupted belief to be looking after one’s interests. What we obtain through our labor is on loan from our Creator as is our very life which we will need to give back sooner or later. We are merely stewards of God’s generosity and providence towards us. The landowner of the parable did not account for the possibility of death. Foolishness can be humorous and embarrassing. Wisdom is the ability to count one’s days ([Ps. 90:12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+90%3A12&version=NrsV)) and to use our time well, honoring God in all ways. Wealth is not bad per se; there is no division between wisdom and money. But “true wealth is being ‘rich toward God,’ that is, rich in faith, wisdom, truth, good works, fruits of righteousness."[[1]](#footnote-1) The man was doing nothing wrong in wanting to secure his future; he was being prudent. The problem was that *in the present moment* he was driven by what he owned: that became fundamentally important to him. Does our worry about the future control our present? Are we so consumed by our anxiety that we forget that we are not alone in the world, that we belong to God, that we have neighbors and we are our brothers and sisters keepers? When we become so self-centered that we are blind to the presence of others, we act like selfish fools who say in their heart: “There is no God.” ([Ps. 14:1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+14%3A1&version=NrsV))

The black scientist George Washington Carver [1864?–1943] stressed that “how far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and the strong. Because someday in life you will have been all of these.”[[2]](#footnote-2) This is the biblical wisdom that instructs us that we are not alone in the world and are called to be the Body of Christ, the Image of the invisible God ([Col. 1:15](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+1%3A15&version=NrsV)) and God’s Wisdom ([1 Cor. 1:18-31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+1%3A18-31&version=NrsV)). This is our calling as Christian faithful: to recognize God at work in everyone, and to reach out a hand of hope, to speak a word of love, to sing a song of happiness, to share a tear of joy or pain, to speak a word of praise, to murmur a prayer, to stand together against those forces that would divide us, isolate us, and block our journey toward the divinely ordered unity of Christ’s Body.

We are called on a journey to become the righteous of God, recognizing that the path is neither short nor easy, but firm in the knowledge that if we have died in Christ our life is “hidden with Christ in God.” When we progress to the point of revealing Christ in us, there will be no distinction between the life of Christ and our life revealed in glory. So, the apostle Paul warns us: watch out for “anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth” and pay attention to and feed that new self of yours made in the image of Christ where “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!” Racist systems have no place in the Kingdom of God. Gender and age discrimination have no place in the Kingdom of God. Economic exploitation has no place in the Kingdom of God. Depletion of the environment has no place in the Kingdom of God. Ignoring the plea of immigrants and refugees has no place in the Kingdom of God. Separating traumatized children from their desperate parents has no place in the Kingdom of God. Are we ready to stand for the gospel?

May God have mercy on us and guide us on our way. Amen.

1. Brian Stiller, Preaching Parables to Postmoderns, p. 101 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. George Washington Carver, as quoted in Christina Vella, *George Washington Carver: A Life*, 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)