

***“Where Do We Find Meaning in Life?”***

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Rev. Ursula E. Schreffler

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**Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.** How many of you collect things? What do you collect? How did your collection get started? Ask anyone—there is no limit to the things that people collect. And there are also many reasons why people start a collection. They might collect things in order to make money or the collection might be the result of a relationship with a special person. When I was younger, I collected coins and stamps and seashells because I found them all so interesting and unique. My great aunt loved to travel and she helped me start a collection of international dolls, so that collection had a special meaning for me and sparked my own interest in other cultures.

Collecting is popular and easy because we live in a society of stuff. We collect our stuff, we surround ourselves with it, we attach special meaning to our stuff, and then someone dies and we inherit all their stuff and before we know it, we have way more stuff than we know what to do with. Now I’m not saying that all of our stuff is bad. No one wants to leave the house without a few important things like their keys or their glasses or their cell phone or their wallet or their water bottle or their medication or ... you get the point. Stuff piles up. And sometimes our stuff can weigh us down.

So Jesus gets straight to the point in today’s gospel lesson: Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. Too much stuff can distort our priorities. Jesus warns his followers, through the experience of the rich man, that relying on possessions to bring deep meaning to our lives is a fool’s errand. The rich man is a fool because he builds bigger and bigger barns to house all of his crops, but he never invests his heart in treasures that will last. His only concern is how to protect his belongings, and he tells his soul that he is satisfied. But he is sorely mistaken. He is focused only on himself. I dare say, his life is meaningless.

The writer of Colossians, whether the Apostle Paul or one of his close followers, reminds us that our relationship with Jesus Christ is what gives meaning to our lives. Through our baptism, we *have been raised with Christ* and therefore, we are to set our minds on the ways of the divine, not on the ways of the world. We are to set our minds on our relationships and the people we love, not the stuff that we love and want to protect forever.

We learned last week that the easiest way to strengthen our relationship with Jesus is through prayer, and last week’s lessons were all about the power of persistent prayer. We pray because we trust that God is listening and we trust that God can guide us through life. The meaning in our lives is not found in the abundance that we store in brand new, bigger barns. No, real meaning in life is found in the abundance of love that we receive from God and, in turn, share with others.

Think about it; for every miserly person who lives in isolation and won’t share any resources, how many more people do you know who support charities and social service agencies? How many people do you know who volunteer their time to work at the Medical Center, or who drive seniors to the doctor, or who clean a neighbor’s snowy driveway? How many people do you know who help with the Food Pantry or the Ronald McDonald House or clean up trash on the highway? These folks recognize the value in giving of themselves, their time, or their

possessions. They give because their faith moves them to share with others. They would rather reach out to the community than sit at home, guarding their resources, and feeling anxious and frustrated because they gave in to their greed.

I look around and I am full of hope and joy for the future. I see communities that value their people and communities that are willing to work to strengthen themselves from within. For example, do any of you know a man named Junior, who lives with intellectual disabilities and is a volunteer with the Londonderry Fire Company? He always comes to the Election Day Soup Sale at my church in Union Deposit and he shows up with the South Hanover Township workers. Junior grew up not far from my church. He is a familiar face in the community and everyone seems to watch out for him and accept him for who he is. A community of people who lived only meaningless lives would never be able to support the most vulnerable members, like Junior.

I see over and over again how folks realize that their lives are dependent upon others and that we all have a responsibility to our neighbors. Yes, the toil and labor can be difficult. And sometimes no one says “thank you.” But the payoff is great. Supporting the most vulnerable and sharing resources to build community benefits us all by providing safety and support when the storms of life arrive.

Jesus spent a great deal of his time preaching about economic issues. His point was not to say that money and wealth are evil, but to point out that we are all connected through the Holy Spirit, and that our lives and our resources are to be used for God’s glory. His goal was for humanity to create community with the abundance that we receive from God. So if Jesus showed up today, what do you think he would say? Are we using our resources wisely? Are our lives meaningful? What do you think, friends? **Amen.**