

You Can't Take It With You

**Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14, 2:18-23; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21; Psalm 107:1-9, 43
8-5-07**

The tragic collapse of the bridge in Minneapolis this past week brought into sharp focus for me, once again, how fragile life is and how quickly it may end for any one of us.

I have friends in Minnesota and a grandniece who attends school there at the University of Minnesota. I had managed to touch base with most of them within twenty-four hours and finally heard from my niece letting me know her daughter was fine. Blessedly, she had not returned to school yet, because this particular bridge is one she walks and drives over several times each day on her way to class from her apartment. Her mother is a little concerned about leaving her at school in the next week or so. I reassured her that all will be well, but we never know.

This tragedy, coupled with others closer to home in the past weeks, reminds us that we never know when it will be our lives will be demanded of us. This is a thought we do not like to dwell upon. No matter how difficult life is for many of us, we would almost always choose life over death.

Certainly the author of Ecclesiastes would choose to live forever so that he might enjoy the fruits of his labor. He had a problem thinking that someone who had not worked as he had would inherit all he had set aside. He hoped the person would be wise, if this was to be the fate of his earthly treasure.

We need to remember that the little book of Ecclesiastes is made up of reflections of a philosopher. It is not a statement of faith. And it is a good thing it is not because we would find it quite depressing and cynical if we tried to read it that way. Even though the author seems to say that life is a dreary treadmill he admits that it is worth living. There is no doubt that he lived for and loved his possessions.

In the same way the man in the gospel of Luke cherished all he possessed. His life was so bound up in things that all he wanted to do was acquire more and more and create storage space for them. We all know people like this, there are never enough things around them, nor ever enough money.

He was not at all like the Methodist pastor and his wife who took shelter in a closet in the midst of a tornado. Methodists move their pastors about quite a bit, every 5 years or so, and this couple had just learned that they would be moving again. Upon emerging from the closet they discovered it was all that was left of the house. The wife said to the husband, "This will be our easiest move ever." They had little to no earthly possessions left.

Perhaps a tornado would have helped the barn-builder in Jesus' story grasp what was important in life before it was too late. Unfortunately, he lost his perspective on life and never found it before he died. The lack of a spiritual life of a greater depth was something he could never be bothered with acquiring, and, so, he lost it all. All that he had hoped to live with and for was gone and like the author of Ecclesiastes, his heirs would have his fortune. Because as we all know, "You really can't take it with you."

What is the message in all of this? That it is best to develop a spiritual nature and to build our true treasure in our relationship with God. Everything else eventually passes away and we are left empty.

Colossians echoes the messages from these other two readings by reminding us all that we are to turn away from the pull of earthly things. This is not easy to do. Letting go of anything is very difficult for all of us, even when we know it is in our best interest. We hang on to old-self-defeating habits that continually drag us down. We might talk a good game and truly believe we have gotten beyond harmful behavior, but quite often we have not. It is just too easy to slip back into old patterns that seem to bring us some relief from the problems in life. It is easier to construct more barns of the heart and soul in which to store our earthly treasures than to see new and better ways of handling life and those we encounter in it.

We are not exactly exploring new territory all alone when we seek to set aside our old lives to take on the new as Christians. We have a trailblazer before us who guides us into a new way of living. Jesus never judged others but did show them the doors they needed to open to enter a new way of life. We have been shown the same doors. We simply need to reach out and open them and walk through closing them on our old worn out habits and responses. It is often a relief to leave behind the same old sad ways we have with handling things, ways that never bring us to lasting happiness and peace. Ways that lead us to filling our lives with a dreadful emptiness stored in our ever-larger barns.

The choice lies before us, as ever, and the choice is always ours. Let us all choose wisely. Amen