

There is an old Gospel hymn entitled “Only Trust Him.” It has some nice words. In the chorus we sing “Only trust him, only trust him, only trust him now; he will save you, he will save you, he will save you now.” It’s a nice little hymn. We like to trust him when we are told about good things he will do for us. But are we as quick to trust him when he gives us warnings to keep us out of trouble? He has a big warning for us today, but it is a warning that runs head-on into the beliefs and values of our culture.

To continue on here in Lent of 2018, we need to take another step with this idea of things that are addictions for Americans and America. Why are addictions bad? Well, addictions are bad because they keep us from being free. They block us from being able to make our own choices. According to Jane Velez-Mitchell, many Americans are “Stuffers.” We are addicted to STUFF. It might not even matter what it is, but we seem to just want more. I am not a big fan of going to a mall, ever, but I was recently at the mall in Boardman last and I was watching people from the foodcourt. I was amazed watching smaller children, 2nd graders and Jr. Hi kids, all parading through the mall with their nice bags filled with items from different shoppes. It never dawned on me before, but it almost looked like *they were being taught how to shop*. And by carrying those bags around with certain names on the outside, it almost seems like people are somehow **more** because of what they have in their possession. A few centuries ago the famous philosopher Rene Descartes said the famous words, “Cogito, ergo sum” which means *I think, therefore I am*. Some might suggest today that for many in our culture the phrase might now be “Emo, ergo sum” *I buy, therefore I am*.

Before getting too crazy with all of this, it has been suggested that a good sign of an honest-to-goodness addiction is that people will do something, feel guilty about it, and then try to feel better by going and doing more of the same. There are in fact people who will go shopping and buy things they do not need and worse, cannot afford, bring it all home, and then feel guilty, but the next day they go back and buy some more. Have you ever known anyone who would operate that way? Lots of people have. Stores let people open up instant credit accounts, even giving you cash back if you buy things. 80 years ago, no one could have imagined such a thing. It used to be that you earned, saved, and bought only what you absolutely needed. In the last 20 years, Americans have actually spent 108% of their incomes. How can you spend more than you make? Well, that is where credit came in. And it has come in with a vengeance. What is it about our human nature that makes us want more, and more, and more, even if we cannot afford it? What makes people do reckless things with money (or credit)? Is enough ever enough? We have a story this morning that shows that this problem has been around for a while.

In our story for today, Jesus is confronted by a man who wants him to give a ruling on how he is to split up an inheritance with his brother. We're not sure why Jesus is picked, but he is. The man asking the question seems to have finances on the brain, and he asks Jesus to help. The man doesn't get the results he was looking for, but Jesus gives him what he probably really needs. He gives a warning which is rarely heard in our society today... ***“Watch and keep on guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”*** Could we imagine seeing that

on a big billboard somewhere out on the road today? Jesus says “Look and keep on guard against every kind of greediness...” This almost makes it sound like this is really a danger. Why would Jesus issue a warning against all kinds of greediness, as if it were a kind of threat? Maybe, because it is a threat, especially for our society today. Maybe he would give a warning because greed is a real threat.

Jesus tells a parable that we have heard before: A wealthy man has a good year, in fact a great year with his farm. He already has barns, but he needs more space. Jesus says that the man literally must destroy the barns he has in order to make even bigger ones. He does so, and then, feeling quite secure, talks to his own soul and says “soul, life is good, we’ve got it made... let’s eat, drink, and be merry.” Unfortunately, just as he has this happy talk with his soul, God shows up and says “Fool, say goodbye to your soul. Now who will get your abundance?” Jesus finishes this with a warning: So it is with those who continually store up treasure and are not in a continuous way, rich in God.

The First Sunday in Lent I mentioned that we humans seem to have a hole in our souls, in fact a God-shaped hole. We don’t realize the nature of this hole, and so we, human children of God, created in the image of God, try to fill our semi-divine human emptiness with things that belong to this world. Don’t we realize that we are not of this world? Don’t we realize that the life within us is powered by our Creator? So, if we have a hole inside that can only be filled by connection with God, then we need to figure out that no amount of things from this world are ever going to fill that hole. But still we try. And we don’t listen to the warnings of Jesus and John the Baptist and the Prophets before them. And then we end up giving

away lots of stuff at garage sales, because we have bought too much.

Watch out and be on guard against all kinds of greediness.

It actually makes me want to make my own bumper sticker. I keep seeing this bumper sticker that says THE ONE WHO DIES WITH THE MOST TOYS WINS! Well, no. The one who dies still dies. Here's an idea for a great bumper sticker: It would say "**Hearses Do Not Pull U-Haul Trailers.**" We say we can't take it with us, but we sure seem to keep trying! Jesus gives us his warning, and the warning is real. But then he gives us these words, which will finish off my words...

Jesus reminds us, in the midst of the daily bombardment of TV commercials, often encouraging most of the 7 Deadly Sins, Jesus reminds us of a simple truth: Our heart will be where our treasure is. We should also remember that from Jesus' 1st century Jewish perspective, the heart is the place which controls our actions. The heart is the control center for our wills, or volition. What is our treasure? There is always something that matters to us more than anything else in life. Can we find it at the Mall, or at Stuff-Mart? We need to know what it is because it will control our lives. Is it really worth it? Is it going to save our souls? Our hearts will in fact be there, guaranteed. Only we can honestly answer those questions for ourselves. No one can do it for us. So let's ask ourselves, and if we are wise, let's remember the words of Jesus. One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. AMEN.