

## ***You Can't Take It with You***

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The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost  
Proper 13, Year C  
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Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23  
Psalm 49:1-6  
Colossians 3:1-11  
Luke 12:13-21

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.*  
[Psalms 19:14]

Many of us in this parish, including me, either work for the Federal or State government directly or work for a company under contract with the government to provide goods or services. As such, it is very likely that many of us have been impacted by sequestration and as a result have or will be furloughed for some number of days before the end of the fiscal year; which depending on the number of days one has to serve could take a substantial bite of one's income. In some State and Federal agencies, employees are being furloughed for as many as one day per pay period, which amounts to a 10 percent pay cut. On top of this, most Federal workers are in a middle of a second year without a cost-of-living pay adjustment, so in the face of ever rising costs, it has become increasingly more difficult to make ends meet. Government at all levels is spending less, so those of us who are employed by companies that do business with the government are likely to be impacted also.

Even if your employment is not connected with the Federal Government, it is almost impossible to escape the economic challenges of these austere times. Many companies have laid-off workers or have sharply reduced wages and benefits. Unemployment, while coming down, is still at record highs; many in communities around us have had to deal with foreclosures; affordable housing is out of reach for many in our midst; while interest rates are at all-time lows, it is much harder for those with bad or bruised credit histories to qualify for mortgage loans, so for many, that quintessential American dream of home ownership is far out-of-reach. Some retirees and others on fixed incomes struggle to make ends meet in the face of the ever-rising cost of living.

Right now, we live in very challenging economic times. However, some in our midst live life unfettered by the worries and concerns of these challenging economic times, and enjoy the freedom that comes from trusting that God will see to their needs much as He does for the lilies of the fields. People with this mind-set live their life knowing that "you can't take it with you," so they don't try, and that is liberating.

I have a good friend who owns a very small business. She is a Korean immigrant who has been in the United States for about eight years. She is a single mom with two children – this fall one will be a high school junior and the other will be a college freshman. This family of very modest means lives in a small apartment with few of the amenities most of us would regard as bare necessities. But this is a remarkable family. While their means are modest, they don't consider themselves poor, underprivileged, or

deprived – not by a long-shot. In fact, they consider themselves blessed. And I think they are, too.

Mom works at her small business at least six days a week, sometimes working 10-12 hours a day. In return for her labor, in a good month, she may make about \$6,000 before taxes, which would yield an annual income about only four times the Federal poverty level for a family of three. But, she still finds a way to carve out quality time to spend with her daughters for shared meals, mother-daughter time, and this year, an out-of-town vacation. On top of that, although her spoken and written English skills are above-average, mom attends a church-sponsored English as-a-second-language class for Korean immigrants two evenings a week because she wants to improve her English skills to be better able to communicate with her customers and because she wants to model the importance of continuing education for her daughters.

My friend's two daughters border on brilliant, take advanced placement and other challenging courses at school, have been on the honor roll every semester since junior high school, and the incoming college freshman got the highest score possible on her college placement tests. And these girls are among the most delightful people you would ever want to meet.

This family is very active in their church; the daughters especially love their church youth group activities and regularly participate in their church's fellowship and community-service opportunities. Because furthering God's work is a priority for this family, they give 10 percent of their first fruits to their church.

About a month ago, my friend told me that one Friday she attended a potluck fellowship activity at her church. That evening she noticed another mom at church with her son. This family was new to their congregation. The mom and son's clothes were well worn and my friend noticed that the son was eating at the potluck as though he had not eaten well in a while and was likely not to do so in the near future. That evening, my friend spoke to her pastor and learned that the mom had recently lost her minimum wage job and that the family was struggling financially. So, my friend gave the pastor \$100 for him to give anonymously to the family so that they could buy groceries and that next Sunday my friend purchased another \$100 worth of groceries and arranged to have her pastor give the food to the family. In addition to continuing to provide anonymous donations of financial support for food to this family, my friend invited the boy to join her and her daughters on a visit to Six Flags Amusement and Water Park.

I have been impressed by my friend and her family since I met them. I knew that they had a generous spirit, but I was struck by my friend's generosity towards this new family in their congregation.

Like many of us, my friend and her family have hopes, dreams, and plans for the future. While many of my friend's hopes, dreams, and plans are for the future success and well-being of her daughters, the center piece of her desire is not focused on acquisition of creature comforts and wealth. In many of our conversations, my friend talks about

how she and her family might be able to help others now and in the future. My friend believes firmly that God has and will continue to provide all that she and her family needs. My friend believes that she and her family have been blessed and she is constantly thinking about how these blessings can be shared with others. In fact, one of my friend's hopes, dreams and plans include becoming an ordained minister. I have no doubt that one day that dream will become a reality, and I have suggested to her that, through her Baptism, she is already a minister and that she certainly teaches and preaches the Gospel through her daily life.

So, when I read the Gospel lesson appointed for today, I thought about my friend and her family. They are the very opposite of the man Jesus describes in his parable of *The Rich Fool*. Their focus is not on acquiring wealth, or as the expression goes, *keeping up with the Joneses*. They have no *vast store of crops* to be laid up in a barn for security for years to come, and certainly not so much that they need to tear down their barns and build larger ones. This family doesn't have an abundance of wealth and possessions, but what they do have, both temporal and spiritual, they share with others. This family lives their lives in the mindset of the Lilies of the Field; not worrying so much day-to-day about what they will eat or what they will wear. As with Jesus' parable about the lilies in Matthew's Gospel, this family strives for God's kingdom and His righteousness, trusting that *all these things will be given to [them] as well*. As a result they have an abundance of peace and are rich in God.

*May the God of hope fill [us] with all joy and peace as [we] trust in him.* [Romans 15:13, NRSV]

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.