



Let us pray:

Lord God,  
You have declared your kingdom is among us,  
Open our ears to hear it,  
Our hands to serve it,  
Our hearts to hold it.  
This we pray in Jesus' name. *Amen.*

I served in the Diocese of Mississippi before returning to the Diocese of Indianapolis. Bishop Duncan Gray required that all new clergy serve as chaplains at the Diocesan Camp –Camp Bratton Green or “CBG”. As it turned out, my first year I was assigned to Regular Session 6 which hosted more than 75 fifth and sixth graders. Not my cup of tea but it didn’t matter. It was my assignment and when the Bishop says “go” – well, you go. It was a time of unbelievable noise and energy. The young people and many of the camp counselors and cabin parents– some of who had been coming to camp for years – found fellowship, games and some pretty serious theological messages wrapped up in fun ways.

The theme for the week centered around reality shows: The CBG Network presented “The Unreal World” through skits, events and conversation. We were introduced to a spokesperson modeled on Billy Mays – that bearded always upbeat pitchman who urged us to buy OxyClean, Orange Glo, and a host of other home products that would make our houses sparkle and us the envy of all of our neighbors. Our “Billy Mays” had a wonderful toll-free number for audiences to call to buy the latest aluminum helmet that would protect us from alien rays designed to scramble our thoughts or a multi-purpose cell phone and meat tenderizer. Just call 1-800-ALLJUNK. The cost is 3 payments of \$19.95 – but wait, if you call in the next 5 minutes, the cost is only \$9.95. The phone number says it all: 1-800-ALLJUNK.

We so often seek to keep up with the Joneses or simply want to be on the cutting edge that we don't take time to think about whether we really need what we are buying. Too often what we buy on impulse is "all junk."

Jesus thunders that we are to take care. To be on our guard against all kinds of greed. He reminds us that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. This is a message that we hear from Jesus time and time again. Jesus urges us to be thoughtful about how we spend our time and our money. That we consider where our hearts are when we look at our treasures. That we recognize material things as things which can be eaten by moths or ruined by rust. He asks whether we are rich towards God, the true measure of wealth.

Richard Bauckman says that the "seduction of wealth is the illusion it gives us that we have control over our lives."<sup>1</sup> There is an old adage that speaks to this: Question: How do you make heaven laugh? Answer: Tell God your plans.

If you believe, as I do, that God wants the very best for us, then while we can and should make plans, we need to be alert to the possibility of change. That truly honoring God with all our mind, our body and our soul, may cause us to take a side trip. That what we thought we needed may be a want and not a need.

What does it mean to be rich towards God? Paul tells us in his letter to the Colossians that we are to set our minds on things that are above and not on things on earth. We need to put to death those things in our life that are keeping us from focusing upon God. Paul's list of vices includes fornication, impurity, evil desire and greed. He continues by listing anger, wrath, malice, and abusive language. And Paul equates greed with idolatry.

Why is that? What is it about greed that causes both Jesus and Paul to denounce it? We see an answer in the parable about the rich fool. The rich fool had an abundant harvest- that is usually a good thing.

But rather than sharing the bounty with his neighbors, he was going to tear down his existing barns in order to build bigger ones. He was going to keep the abundance for himself. This man, wealthy and now blessed with overflowing crops, remained focused on himself. His life was turned inward, not outward.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Bauckman in The Lectionary commentary, vol. 3 (Roger Van Horn, ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co, 2005), 381.

When we are greedy, we are inward focused, we are selfish, enough is never enough. Our world actually shrinks because we become impassioned about keeping what is ours. We shut other people out.

But none of it is ours to begin with. All that we have is God's. When we share an abundant harvest, we share the blessings God has given us. When we share an abundant harvest, we love our neighbor.

And what happens to the rich man? God speaks: "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you." Our times are not our own. Our lives are in God's hands. Whether this rich man heard God speak and changed his plans, we do not know. Whether he actually died that night or not, as long as his focus was on himself and the crops being stored in bigger barns, his life ended that night. Where is your treasure? There your heart is also.

CBG Network offered glimpses of an unreal world. A world where getting ahead at the expense of others was the norm. In fact, being a friend, looking out for others, thinking about something other than yourself, was ridiculed. You weren't likely to win the game – to garner the fame – if you were a good guy. But this was an unreal world. Too often even like the world all around us. Where the phone number is true, too often: 1-800-ALLJUNK.

God has a different plan for us. A plan that gives us a richness of life. Focus on God. Focus on the things above, where what is valued is how you act towards your neighbor and yourself. A life where if your life is demanded of you this night the next phrase would be "well done, thou good and faithful servant."

*On this Sunday, we met in Whitlock Hall for the 10:30a service to have a more informal worship service that included some conversation.*

*How do you define greed?*

*Is greed only about money?*

*Is greed always "bad"?*

*What else is going on in the Gospel reading – why do you think Jesus doesn't help the one who asks for help?*

*Are you familiar with "triangulation" – is it always a "bad" thing? Could it be a good thing in cases of domestic abuse or other illegal acts?*

*What message does Jesus want us to learn this morning?*