

A sermon delivered by Sister Gemma Doll, O.P., at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, August 1, 2010.

“Are You Entitled to a Barn?”

Hosea 11:1-1; Luke 12:13-21

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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What is wealth? Nobody really criticizes the rich because in the quiet of our hearts, we secretly want to be wealthy – if honest, we are entitled to a certain standard of living, of comfort. We are “entitled” to that barn! Jesus helps us to see what makes up wealth, abundance – and what is poverty.

I am reminded of a visit to our missionaries in Nigeria. Our sisters ministered in Zuru, a rural village of made-by-hand mud huts with thatch roofs. The women walked to the stream carrying large terra cotta urns to fetch water. There was no electricity, nor TV, nor means of transportation. Yet I experienced visible joy in conversation, spontaneous smiles, children playing and lively singing while pounding the grain. God was palpably part of the daily rhythm of life.

One of those sisters is studying in the U.S. and I took her to a trailer park where mostly immigrant poor lived. Her question echoes today, “Where is poverty?”

The families have a car, a TV, a sturdy home – but the parents hate their monotonous work, there is obvious marital stress, they yell at the kids, their conversation is filled with complaints, their

faces are tense. Everything depends on their own efforts. There is no mention of God. But a sense of entitlement – that life *should* be better!

On his sabbatical, Pastor Tim has entered the desert – a sabbatical in the Middle East – in the line of the Desert Abbas and Ammas. The stark desert wilderness clarifies the tentacles of entitlement and forces one to one’s knees in humble dependence and gratitude for the tiny drop of water, the hint of shade. In the glaring heat, little distracts from the awesome presence of God and the pressing problems of the human heart. The desert calls one to relearn and humbly receive the gift of the ordinary: eating, sleeping, breathing, temperature.

In contrast to the entitled farmer, less becomes more, inaction is a powerful source of action, change comes through silence, humility buoys up the heart. What is wealth in the sight of God? Few would contest that Warren Buffet and Bill Gates qualify as wealthy. “In the sight of God” they use their wealth for charity, to make the world a better place, for the common good. It is a radical model for each of us, one blessed by Jesus, to view whatever wealth we have not as mine, not as an owner, but as humble stewards – to use for God’s work.

Or are we genetically selfish and cannot help but fall into the entitlement trap of the rich farmer? Am I entitled to a barn? Our whole economy is based on making a profit. To make a profit is our duty, and unrelated to morality or relationships. The rich farmer made money the old-fashioned way – he earned it! Jesus’ parable points to the distortion of our own beliefs, our own entitlements, our own self-indulgence and we are left empty, a fool, judged.

Three idols have corrupted our discipleship of Christ:

1) **Limitless desire** – Compulsively wanting more, shopping unrelated to need vs. temperance –slow down and savor what is, give thanks for we don’t deserve.

2) **Absolute property** – Myth of ownership, bigger houses and expensive toys vs. common good – duty of charity and justice.

3) **Money/wealth** – Believe money makes me happy and is not dependent on labor vs. wealth in the sight of God.

In Hosea, we see that God draws us back. God's heart is overwhelmed, and patiently, tenderly like a parent, God reorients and resettles. Through our intimate relationships, God draws us back, reorients us.

When is enough, *enough*? I read somewhere that 75% believe it is not wrong to have excess while others starve. Perhaps we can enter into solidarity with Pastor Tim in the desert and intentionally fast this week: Fast from buying that gorgeous blouse that just went on sale; fast from dessert; fast from a glass of wine; and notice what happens within, what space opens.

I was tempted to steer clear of money in this preaching. It raises defenses, it's too personal, it's separate from morality. Yet in the scriptures, money is addressed more frequently than sex! Money and wealth are too important for the soul to be left just for economists. As disciples of Jesus, we expect to grow rich in the sight of God, not because we are entitled to a barn, but we love extravagantly and undeservedly gifted with grace.

As with St. Paul in Colossians, we pray to put aside your old self with its past deeds and put on a new man, one who grows in knowledge as he is formed anew in the image of his creator.

Blessing: May abundance in the sight of God, peace and mercy fill you and your family all the week through. The Lord bless you in the name of the Creator, the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit. And the people say, "Amen."