



Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (C)
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
August 4, 2019
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

†May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our strength and redeemer. Amen.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes, the writer warns, "Vanity of vanities... All is vanity." In the Letter to the Colossians, Paul says to get rid of anger, wrath, malice, slander and abusive language and "do not lie to one another."

In the Gospel, the parable of the rich man, did you catch the use of first person pronouns present in just a couple of sentences? The rich man seems to take credit for all his success without referring to employees and perhaps family members who helped enable that success. He doesn't refer to others nor does he give thanks to God.

The rich man says: "What should *I* do, for *I* have no place to store my crops?" "*I* will do this: *I* will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there *I* will store all my grain and my goods. And *I* will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry'" (Luke 12:17-19). There it is: Ever wondered where the much used phrase, "Eat, drink and be merry" originated? Well, there it is.

In the consumer driven world in which we live, we indeed enjoy eating, drinking and making merry. We strive to live into a kind of happiness that is at times, elusive. One might assess that the rich man lives in a kind of world of false happiness, vanity, a narcissistic reality, in which he is the center of life. Indeed, self-centeredness seems to be a kind of innate reality for many people in the world in which we live.

Discerning and logic-centered individuals can assess that the rhetoric in today's society exemplifies signs of narcissism. When one postures one's self cloaked in the first person, then, the use of "I" permeates the narrative. The "I" takes all the credit, productive or not.

In today's world, we witness twists and turns from the truth into potential falsehoods, distorted realities and lies. It isn't a big step to move from that world to a world of verbally tearing down others and using hate-filled language, language which at its core is demeaning and destructive.

As Christians, we realize that such language seems to be more the norm today rather than the exception. That norm is slowly eroding the culture of civility for which we strive and long for ourselves, our children and their children after them.

A fear is that we are changing. A world of civility and care for others seems to be slipping away in dramatic and concerted ways like never before. Journalists and historians chronicle narratives which paint a picture which is a far cry from the world in which we lived or thought we lived not too many years ago.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to a higher standard of love and care for others. We are called to stand up and be counted. We are called to embrace 'only' language which is consistent with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Language which is destructive is ‘bad’ news, bad for those at whom it is hurled and bad for all of us. We are called to reject destructive language, racism of any kind, white supremacy of any kind and hate-filled actions of any kind. We are called to live into a reality which is consistent with the wisdom and love of God in Jesus.

We do not live in isolation from others. We are knit together in a fabric which ties each of us together in community, a local community, a national community, an international community and the community of faith which we call the beloved community of God. We are one with those suffer wherever they are in life.

That which tears down one ultimately tears down all of us. That which seeks to harm others seeks to harm all of us. Unfortunately, we live in a reality where harming others seems to be par for the course! How can that be?

The psychologist, Dr. M. Scott Peck, wrote a book on his many years of counseling individuals. In his *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, Dr. Peck speaks to evil in the hearts and minds of people whose destructive ways of living weave a web which ensnares others in a systemic reality. That web is so pervasive that it becomes its own reality, a reality counter to good, a reality which thrives in perpetrating hate and the destruction of others. If that sounds frightening, I believe it is and should sound an alarm for all of us who seek ‘good’ in life. (https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4451.People_of_the_Lie)

Today, we might ask two questions: “What must we do to embrace God’s compassion and love in our hearts so that others may experience them as well?” “What must we do to bring about the reign of God, the love of God, in our midst?” Questions without easy answers!

A familiar song comes to mind, “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me”. We could reshape that text into “Let there be good on earth, positive energy and love on earth and let them begin with us.” I believe we are here this morning not to escape the darkness of life but to bring light into life and to ask God for transformation of the human spirit.

We can be catalysts of good and reshape the world around us. The Holy Scriptures, the Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood, and the sharing of our life as community can indeed impact us, as we strive to live into the Way of Jesus.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to praise and bless God and to preach God’s love, compassion and mercy with our own lives. As God’s people, we are called to be people of gratitude to God for the many gifts which are ours and to share our abundance with others.

We are called to be people who strive to do ‘good’ in the world, to build one another up and to live into a reality which brings about the reign of God, the love of God and the joy of God into the world. We can do that. We have been given the grace to do that.

Let us embrace the grace of God and do all we can to bring about peace, justice and mercy in our world. We can be active demonstrations of the love of God, a love which cherishes us and enables others to experience God’s love through us. May it be so today and every day!