

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

I recently read a story about a woman named Huguette Clark, who passed away in 2011 at the age of 104, one of the richest women in America. An heiress to a fortune in railroads, copper mines and banks, Huguette's father, William Andrew Clark, owned the land that would one day become Las Vegas. Though she owned a forty-two-room apartment, the largest on New York's Fifth Avenue, and a one hundred million dollar mansion perched on a bluff overlooking the Pacific, Huguette lived a simple and reclusive existence in one small room. While she had not been seen in public for over fifty years, caretakers of her estates claimed she was in good health and spirits. Mystified that she would turn her back on fame and fortune, a reporter billed this story as a tragic tale of intrigue.

It was in Santa Barbara that she began to withdraw from a path of notoriety and fast living. Some say everything stopped for her when her mother died. Huguette was extremely close to her Mother. They were constant companions, of like spirit, both warm

and giving. During the Depression, Huguette and her mother tore down their Santa Barbara mansion and rebuilt it, just to give people jobs. Almost everyone who worked for them had a job for life and was treated with love and care. Though Huguette rarely used a chauffeur, everyday she sent the driver to pick up their elderly staff. Valuing relationships over treasures, Huguette confided to her friends that her great wealth was a “menace to happiness.” From the world’s perspective, Huguette’s life of simplicity and anonymity reflected a tragic breakdown of a “poor little rich girl.” But I wonder if her life was misunderstood.

Our gospel story today speaks of richness towards God that is not found in what we store up, but in a life lived in relationship with our Creator and provider, and with each other. When a man from the crowd asked Jesus to settle a dispute over an inheritance, he responded, “take care and be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” And then he told the crowd a parable of a man whose

crop was so abundant, he wanted to tear down his barns and build bigger ones to store up for a rainy day. That way he could enjoy the fruits of his labor. Having just taught his followers a way to pray that asked God to provide their daily bread, Jesus reminded them of the foolishness of believing that possessions could provide happiness. Rather, Jesus taught that one's focus must be on how we spend the life and gifts we are given.

When I read about the rich man's idea to tear down his barns to build bigger ones, I thought of Huguette and her Mother tearing down their home and rebuilding it again. Huguette and her Mother sought to provide jobs for those suffering in the depression, while the rich man's intent was to secure his own happiness. We can read into this text that God wants us to use wisely, that which we have. But this story is more about matters of the heart. Jesus' words invite us to examine something deeper; where our dependencies lie, what possesses us. Soon after this passage we hear the familiar teaching, "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

In our culture we are bombarded with messages about what we need, what will make us happy, what product will end our dissatisfactions. Exploiting our vulnerabilities and fears, sales tactics warn of limited supplies, inventory that won't last, a scarcity that increases demand. We can buy into promises that money and power create independence that will transcend our vulnerabilities. But then we begin to love things and use people, and in the process, lose sight of our relationship with God and one another. In that connection we find the richness of life. This story challenges us to consider our misplaced loyalties.

Years ago I had a co-worker, Marge, who every morning marked the days off the calendar until retirement. Marge found little joy in her daily life, tired and burned out, she focused on a time when she would have enough to really be free and enjoy life. The day came for her to retire and we had a wonderful celebration, knowing she had big plans. Six weeks into her retirement Marge was diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer and died a few

months later. I remember this as a touchpoint in my own journey, re-examining the stewardship of my life and priorities. Storing up our joy or our passion or our service for another day means that we live in a kind of bondage to our own vision. There is a paradoxical freedom that comes with entrusting our lives to God’s purpose. It is not an invitation to irresponsibility, but to recognize from whom our blessings flow.

When Jesus said, “this very night, your life is being demanded of you,” he calls us to account for how we spend our lives. What does it mean to be rich towards God? How do we use our resources, our passion and energy? We can look to the stories we have heard this summer to flesh out what Jesus means by being rich towards God. The parable of the Good Samaritan taught us about “doing love” and breaking down the boundaries that separate us from our neighbors. The story of Mary and Martha reminds us to find time to connect with God and not become distracted by the “busyness” of life. Jesus’ teaching on prayer helps us to understand that we can

come to God with open hearts, trusting that if we ask, knock and persist doors will open for us. And today's lesson invites us to examine what possesses us and realign our priorities with God's purpose for our lives; to spread God's love for the world.

Yesterday your vestry spent the day asking some of these important questions. Where is God calling this community of faith at this particular time? Are we using our energies and passion to further the kingdom of God? How do we grow in relationship to Christ and one another so that we can share God's transforming love? If we are to live as faithful disciples we will turn our focus from worry to a trust in God's goodness and grace holding ourselves accountable to the abundant blessings we have been given. Through our actions and attitudes we will model for a troubled world that in giving we receive, and that our worth is found in relationship to God and loving our neighbor. Huguettes story suggests that living counter-culturally will always be misunderstood, and all the money in the world cannot satisfy our deepest hunger.

May God help us to form our hearts for the mission we've been given; to love God with our whole heart, and to love our neighbors. As we share our abundance, we spread a kingdom that is possessed by God. Amen.