

August 4, 2019

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings: Ecclesiastes 2:21-23; Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11; Luke 12:13-21

Preacher: Sheryl Zabel

Today's excerpt from the Letter to the Colossians contains two interesting, and perhaps challenging, quotes.

“Think of what is above, not of what is on earth.”

“Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly...”

In the current issue of *National Catholic Reporter*, there is an article about a recent conference involving the Catholic Climate Covenant and Creighton University in Nebraska. Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* was referenced, and proposals for turning the words of this document into actions were offered. But in his keynote address at the conference, San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy spoke about estrangement “from God, from nature, from one another, and from truth itself.” He said that this estrangement “reverberates through our relationship with the Earth that is our common home.”

An editorial in the same issue, states that “Catholics and other people of faith...have an additional contribution to make to the conversation [on climate change and the environment]. Our language, incorporating both science and spirituality, can give voice, as Francis did in his encyclical, to...expressions of awe and wonder...”

But wait a minute! Doesn't this conflict with Colossians? Isn't the earth supposed to be a temporary stopping off place on our way to heaven, our true home? Aren't we in exile, here on earth? Aren't we supposed to be looking up, toward God?

No, we are not. God is not only up in the sky, or out in space. Such language is metaphoric. It's not meant to be literal. The earth, and all life

on earth, is part of God's magnificent creation. God does not want us to ignore, let alone destroy, the earth. Far from it.

So, let's return to Colossians. What are the earthly parts of us that we need to put to death? Not mountains or lakes or rivers or fruitful soil or the air that we breathe. Not mammals or birds or fish or trees. Colossians lists some other things: "immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry." Oh. God wants us to kill off all that prevents us from being all that God has meant for us to be. God wants us to be like Jesus.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus shares a parable about a rich man who wants to be richer. He doesn't ask God about building bigger barns to store more stuff. He asks himself. It's all about him. Other people are not part of his equation, and God certainly isn't. But God warns the man that he can't control everything, and that he is not rich in what truly matters.

Can we Christians listen to God and hear from God what truly matters? And isn't saving our common home, the earth, absolutely crucial in our time? Not so that we can simply enjoy ourselves and store up more things, whether in barns or on our smart phones. But so that we can love God, who is always with us, by loving God's creation. By being people for one another and for all God's creatures.