

Who Do You Trust?

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Sermon for August 20, 1995

The Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost - Year C

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:18-26

Psalm 49:1-11

Colossians 3:1-11

Luke 12:13-21

The psalmist writes that he should not be afraid of the wickedness of those who trust in their goods. He says that they die like everyone else, leaving their wealth to those who come after them.

The writer of Ecclesiastes says pretty much the same thing; that no matter how much we accumulate here and now, we'll all die and we can't take it with us.

I remember a TV show when I was a kid. The thing that I particularly recall about it is that it came on during **American Bandstand** on weekday afternoons. Now, that in itself is not so unusual, many shows on many different channels came on during **American Bandstand**. What was different about this show was that it came on *the same channel*. Dick Clark would get started at 2.45, and then at about 2.58 announce that they'd be cutting away for this other show, and then at 3.30 we were back to Philadelphia.

Someone at ABC figured that since **American Bandstand** was getting such great ratings, they'd stick this new show in the middle of it to give it a boost. You don't see them doing that much anymore.

The name of this other show was **Who Do You Trust?** and those of you with really good memories will recall that the emcee was a comedian from Nebraska named Johnny Carson, and his announcer was a former circus clown named Ed McMahon.

But we're going off on a tangent here. I brought up the show because its title is my question. Who do you trust? Or rather, *where do you put your trust?*

The psalmist and the writer of Ecclesiastes tell us that contrary to what all the t-shirts and bumper stickers say, the one who dies with the most toys...or fabric...has no advantage, that person is dead just like the rest of us. What's the point in working feverishly to accumulate things if we're all going to die anyway?

Is it the old Schlitz mentality that says, "You only go around this way once, so you might as well grab all the gusto"?

Where is our trust if this is what we believe? Surely not in God, and that's unfortunate, because he offers us so much more than our possessions could ever hope to.

Jesus said that there is more to life than the accumulation of possessions. This is good news. This is wonderful news.

It's good news because it tells those of us who have little that we're not out of the game yet. It tells us that contrary to what our culture might tell us, we're *not* failures if we don't have the latest luxury car, the most fashionable clothes, and a hefty bank account. In fact, it tells us that the people who *do* have all these things might be the failures if they lack the right attitude.

Jesus told about a farmer whose land produced more than he could ever use. I'd like to tell you a different story.

I was teaching a computer workshop at Syracuse University, and on this particular day I was showing the ten or so people in the room how to use a spreadsheet.

Now for those of you who don't know what a spreadsheet is, the simplest way I can describe it is that it's a program that lets you do budgets and accounting so that you can keep track of how much you've made, how much you've spent, and how much you'll have at the end of the year.

I started out by telling them, "You've just won \$3 million in the lottery. Now we have to keep track of the money."

I explained that they wouldn't get the 3 million in one lump sum, and showed them how to set up the spreadsheet so that it would take any lottery prize and divide it into 20 equal payments. This brought them down to \$150,000 a year.

Then I showed them how to set up the spreadsheet to figure out how much they'd have left if 28% of the yearly payout was taken in taxes.

Having gotten this far, I said to them, "You now have \$108,000 left to spend this year. What's the first thing you're gonna do with it?"

One of the people in the room said, "Let's give some of it away," and all of a sudden the whole group was discussing organizations like Habitat for Humanity, Amnesty International, and Covenant House. It was only *after* they had given away a fair portion of their prize money that they started talking about things like paying back student loans, buying cars, buying houses, taking it easy, and putting some money aside for when the prize payments stopped coming.

These people understood that there is more to life than the accumulation of possessions. They

understood that there is more to life than trying to keep as much as you can for yourself. You see, there's nothing wrong with being rich, there's nothing wrong with having a lot of nice things...provided you have the right attitude. The rich farmer didn't have the right attitude. The students I taught that day did.

Where do you put your trust? Is it in things that will only comfort you in *this* lifetime, or is it in the one who can also comfort you in the next? Do our possessions and our culture's mad dash to have "more, more, more" blind us to the needs of others, and to our own spiritual needs? Do we spend so much time working for our comfort in this life that we neglect our plans for the next?

Jesus said that there is more to life than the accumulation of possessions. I saw a bumper sticker a few years ago that I really liked. It said, "The one who dies with *their sins forgiven* wins."

Where do you put *your* trust?