



1919 illustration of *The Ant and the Grasshopper* by Milo Winter (wikipedia)

Long predating the Bible, we have from Greek antiquity the morality tales known as *Aesop's Fables*. Written in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, one of these is *The Ant and the Grasshopper*. The ant works hard during the warm weather to store up food for the winter, while the grasshopper fiddles away his time in leisure and play, and is thus unprepared for the harshness of the colder months. Earthly wisdom, it would seem would warn us to do everything humanly possible to prepare for hardship, and put our trust in the care and skill of that preparation. Or, as Mark Twain once said, "Put all your eggs in one basket...and **watch that basket!**"

But, both the Old Testament and the Gospel readings for this morning seem to lean away from such counsel. In Ecclesiastes, we take away the main message that all human striving is vanity and worthless. Not a particularly hopeful lesson!

But, every once in a while, as I read the Old Testament from a New Testament perspective, I am struck by how through the compilation of Holy Scripture, occasionally God drops a kind of hint of the post-resurrection fate of man in the words of the ancient scribes, who wrote the first part of our Bible centuries before Jesus. In verse 14 of this morning's 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter of Ecclesiastes, we read, "I have seen everything under the sun and behold, all is vanity and **striving after wind.**" Now, the interesting thing for me is that the concept which the author of Ecclesiastes uses here is the Hebrew word רֵּעוּת (pronounced "**ruah**") which can mean "wind," is just as often used to mean "spirit." In fact, when the first Greek version of the Old Testament was written in about 250 BC, the *Septuagint* translated the Hebrew by using the Greek word πνεῦμα (pronounced "**pneumah**") which is, in fact, the word used most often in the original language of the Gospels to describe the Holy Spirit. Hmm...is it just possible that, when God was inspiring this portion of Scripture in the minds of Ecclesiastes' author, The Lord was also trying to prepare a message to a people yet unborn, that the only thing which is NOT useless in this life is the time and effort that we humans put into a personal relationship with the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit? It's an intriguing notion!

This is clearly among the main messages of the Gospel lesson for this morning. We are encouraged, as Christians not to put our limited time and resources into achieving earthly goals which are, even in the very best of cases, destined eventually to fade away into the void of earthly death. Such efforts, Christ tells us, are the destiny of fools.

For me, this entire chapter of Luke turns on one key question, asked by this rich farmer in the parable. This man has just had a windfall crop, a banner year. In fact, he has so much "stuff" that he doesn't possess enough storage space for it all. So, weighed down by this question of "stuff" he puts his head in his hands, and looking down at his feet in desperation he says, in verse 19, "What do I do? I have no place to store my "stuff." What do I do now?"

This is a question of desperation isn't it? "What do I do, now?" Why, that's the question a beggar asks when he's run out of bread. "What do I do now?" That's the question a desperate man asks when he's lost his job and he's behind in his mortgage payments. "What do I do now?" That's the question the teenage girl asks when, alone in somebody else's bathroom at 3:00 AM, she looks at the stick and sees very clearly a plus sign.

"What do I do now?" It's the question that divides the desperate from the assured. "What do I do now?" is the question that separates the vulnerable of this world from those who are secure. It defines those who are destitute in life, and sets them apart from the ones who are really, really rich, the people who never have to ask the question, "What do I do now?"

In fact, you could define the truly rich of this life as those people who never have to ask the question, “What am I **going** to do now?” They are the ones who never have to worry. And the truth is, The Lord Christ wants us all to be really, **really** rich.

Now don’t get me wrong. I’m not talking about the Prosperity Gospel here. **Prosperity theology** is that twisted belief of twisted people which distorts the Gospel of Jesus Christ by professing that financial blessing is the will of God for all Christians, and that faith, and positive speech and action will indeed increase your material well-being. And you can find out all about this exciting new religion through my beautiful little book which you can receive by sending just \$79.99 to the mailing address right there at the bottom of your TV screen!

But, you see, Christ wants us all to be really, **really** rich. That’s the lesson the Lilies of the Valley will teach us when we hear it next week, when the Lord reminds us how very much we are worth in God’s eyes, and that it is none other than the Creator God who’s got our backs. With that kind of protection, what in God’s name have you and I got to be worried about? Not all the money in all the world could buy for us the care, the protection, the loving tenderness which is poured out for each of us every new day from the Lord of the universe. Talk about being really, **really** rich!

But, we’re always asking the wrong questions aren’t we? We’re constantly going to God with the wrong kind of requests. That’s what’s going on in the beginning of this chapter. This man who comes to Jesus and asks him to force his brother to divide the family farm with him (See Lk.12:13-14) is looking for earthly justice, for the fairness of **this** world. But that’s not the kind of justice Jesus gives.

What would our lives be like if, at every challenge, we simply made one simple request, and prayed the prayer of Elisha? You remember it, don’t you?

As Elisha’s mentor, when Elijah was getting ready to leave this world, before he is taken up to heaven the younger man asks his teacher for a double portion of his spirit. (See 2Kings:2:9) Wow!!! What would our lives be like if, when confronted by all the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune this world doles out, what would we be like if at every decisive moment of life we simply went to God, placed ourselves and our future in his loving hands, and the only thing we asked the Father for was an increase in our knowledge, understanding, and intimacy with the Holy Spirit? Can you imagine what our lives would be like then? Why, you know, people like that, yes they really could move mountains. And the really glorious thing is that last week, if you remember the passage from Luke Chapter 11, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will indeed be given to every single person who humbly goes to God and asks Him for it.

So good people, when we are confronted with the hardships and calamities of this life, we children of God shouldn’t be holding our heads in our hands and looking down at our feet crying out in desperation, “What should I do now?” No, instead we should be looking up. Just like Paul says, “We should be setting our mind on things above.”

In these moments of darkness and pain, the only question we really need to be asking is: “How can I use this day, which is all I really know I have – how can I use this day to glorify God. Lord, give me your mighty Holy Spirit and the knowledge of you, because that is all that I really have, and all that I’ll ever need.”

And if we can do that, if we can free ourselves from the desperation born of this world’s doubt and fix our eyes above on the assurance of God’s eternal love in Our Lord and Savior Jesus, then we can finally realize just how blessed, and loved, and incredibly rich we really are.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen. Jwb+ 07/25/16