

A couple of weeks ago, we spoke about Amos and his prophecy about the basket of summer fruit. God went to Amos and shared with him a vision of a basket of summer fruit. The basket represented the Israelites and God's frustrations with their greed and idolatry ways. He said to Amos that the end of their time was near. God was angered that the people of Israel were more concerned with accumulating wealth and not living in a way to prepare them for the kingdom of heaven. Today's readings continue about preparing ourselves in God's eyes.

In our reading from the Gospel of Luke, we are told about a man coming to Jesus and urging Jesus to tell the man's brother that he needed to share a family inheritance with this man. And Jesus asked him why he should do that? Jesus reminded the man to not be concerned with greed in any form and share the parable of the rich man who had too much of his crop.

The farmer had an abundant crop that season. He was concerned because he had nowhere to store the crops. His barns were too small for his needs. So, the farmer decided to tear down his old barns and build bigger ones in his place. He was going to make the barns so big that he could keep accumulating crops and storing them until he would eventually never need to work again.

To the man this was a great idea. He could work extra hard now, and reap the rewards later. He could relax and wouldn't need to worry about food or drink. Everything would be taken care of. But, God came to him and asked him about why he was doing that? He told the farmer that if he died while doing this, his life would be in vain because the accumulation of wealth did him no good in death. He couldn't take it with him.

This reminds me about a cook that I once had. He was one of the hardest workers I had. He showed up early and would stay through the shift no matter how late it was without much of a complaint. I mean, nobody would be happy if we didn't have a guest for over an hour and everything was ready to close and somebody walks in 5 minutes before close. I can't think of anyone that didn't get upset with that. But, most times, he would just smile and make the order.

When I met Mike he was working 3 jobs. That isn't uncommon in the service industry. Most people have at least one other job. One day we were working on prep and he cut his finger. He cut it bad enough that I took him to the emergency room. He fought pretty hard about going, but it was obvious he was going to need to get stitches.

We were in the waiting room and I asked him why he fought me so hard on going to the ER. He told me that he didn't have insurance and couldn't afford the visit or the follow up. Since he got hurt on the job, it was covered by workers comp and that we were paying for it.

While we were filling out his paperwork, I told him that I could give him a couple of extra shifts and he would qualify for insurance. But he didn't want more shifts because he was working 25 hours for us and 15 hours each at his other two jobs. He didn't think that he could handle the extra work.

I asked him how much he made at his other two jobs and we were paying him more. So, we talked about how if he left one of his other jobs he would have more time to work for us, would make more money, and would have insurance. You would be surprised at how many times I've had to have this same conversation with other employees.

His answer was like so many others, he was concerned that if he quit one of the other jobs, he wouldn't be able to afford everything when he lost his job with us. He believed that he had little value and could be replaced at any time. He didn't believe that I wanted to invest in him because no one else had.

Mike had 4 siblings and had been working since he was 14 to help support his family. He ended up getting emancipated at 16 with one of his brothers and a sister. I had thought that he was working so many jobs, because he was supporting them. But he wasn't. He was working so much and investing all of his extra income in gold. He was literally buying gold and keeping it in a firebox in his closet.

He believed that eventually he would lose all of his jobs and wouldn't be able to get another. So, he needed a reliable source of income when the time came. In many ways, Mike was like the rich farmer in Jesus' parable. He was accumulating material wealth and nothing else. Gold would always be a reliable source of income and he wouldn't have to worry about banks stealing his money since he had it on his person.

I asked him why he thought he would lose all of his jobs. He said that he thought it was inevitable. He wasn't a nice person. Eventually his mouth would get him into trouble and he would get fired. I found it hard to believe, since he had always been nice to me and he was nice whenever I saw him interact with people. I soon found out that it was an act.

I asked some of the other employees about their interactions with him. I was surprised that every person he worked with actually thought very poorly of him. It seemed that he was so afraid of losing his job, that he had two personas. He was one way when management was around and completely different when it was just him.

We talked about why he behaved that way. Why he felt the need to be two different people. He felt a void in his life. He didn't find value in himself and didn't trust that anyone else would. He would lie, yell, and use some of the most foul language imaginable. We talked about what he said was just as much responsible for how he was judged as his actions were. He needed to decide whether he wanted to continue as he was, expecting to be alone and die with nothing but his gold or if he wanted to change his life and become the person that he said he wanted to be.

This is much like Paul's letter to the Colossians. God judges us not only by what we do, but by what we say. We should not slander, swear, or approach with malice and anger. We should not lie to one another. We should approach people how we want to be approached.

I spoke with Mike a great deal about this. If he wanted people to see him in this new light, he needed to behave this way. He needed to strip away his old self and embrace the new Mike. He had to leave his comfort zone and work for the person he wanted to become.

I'm sure we all have traits that we would like to change in ourselves. We may be quick tempered, or enjoy sharing gossip a little too much. We may say hurtful things to people when we don't get our way. I know personally I struggle with patience.

Why would someone want to change? In Mike's case, he wanted to be a better person for himself. He was tired of being alone and trying to live two lives. In the case of the Colossians, Paul had wanted them to change and remind them about who they were.

The Colossians were Jews and Gentiles that settled the village of Colosea. They established a market and clothing trade in Asia Minor, or what is now Turkey. Paul wrote his letter to them because he had heard that they were faltering and becoming like the Iseralites in Amos' prophecy.

In the end, it doesn't matter what we've accumulated or who we believe we are. In God's eyes we are all his children. No matter what race we are, or how we identify our gender or sexuality. What matters is who we are and how we live. Christ is in all of us.