

Give It Away!

Psalm 107 – Part 1

Luke 12: 13-21

August 1, 2010 –UM

Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

There is a startling contrast between the Magic Penny song and our gospel reading.

The contrast between give it away and save it for my own use.

Some might think the song is just a nice little song that we often sing with the children as they bring their pennies to go to the M&S fund.

But like many things, the Magic Penny song is deceptively simple... and carries a much deeper and stronger message than you might imagine.

Give it away... you end of having more...

So, I am going to tell some stories about owning things... and then connect those back to our gospel reading.

I have a favourite beach here... an ocean beach...

In fact, it's one of the first places I went when I moved back here two years ago.

It is not one of the real popular ones... it is not serviced... no washrooms, no canteen... no lifeguards...

And because it is not serviced not many people go there, which is a great deal of its appeal for me.

It was the place I went to think things through... to meditate and pray... to be aware of the vastness of God's love and presence...

One time I went there and I was really upset... the reasons don't particularly matter...

And as I walked along the beach, I came across a heart shaped rock... and it was a sign for me that I would make it through this dark period...

I kept that rock in my study where I could see it and be reminded of God's presence until I moved to come here and then it wound up on a plate with other rocks.

One day, I was walking along that beach with one of my sisters... her husband had just been diagnosed with lung cancer, and she didn't know what the future held.

As we walked along, I came across another heart shaped rock... another sign for me that God was still present even in this dark time.

So, now I had two heart shaped rocks...

I still had it in my pocket when I came home and as I looked at it, Jesus' words when the terrified disciples saw him walking across the water.

Those words were, "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid."

I wrote those words in a card and sent it, along with the rock, to my sister and her husband, who when they received it, called me with voices thick with tears to thank me for it.

Mind you, I struggled with giving it away... but it seemed pretty greedy to have two of them...

Fast forward to another day when I celebrated the marriage of two friends.

As a gift, I had a friend make a beautiful wooden plate and I put my other heart shaped rock in it... to symbolize the steadiness of their love for one another and also God's love for them.

But I struggled very hard with my decision to give that rock away...

Keep in mind that it had very powerful links to God's presence and care for me... but as I pondered and prayed in the days that led up to the wedding an overwhelming sense of rightness about giving it away came to me.

It was as if a God was saying, "Catherine, you found that when you needed it the most, trust that when you once again need a sign that you will find one."

And so, I gave it away!

A month or so later, I attended Worship Matters, a UCC symposium on worship, preaching and music.

One morning we had Celtic style worship that was centred on rocks and fire.

The person leading worship had a variety of stones and rocks on the communion table and at the end of worship, invited us to come and take one, as a reminder of our time together.

I went to the communion table... and you know what I found... another heart shaped rock...

Another visible sign for me that God is always with us, no matter what...

Just like the Magic Penny song.

Give it away... you end of having more...

Let's move to the gospel reading, which is both ancient and contemporary...

Jesus is teaching in the countryside... and a man is concerned about getting his fair share of his parents' stuff... and Jesus, rather than answering him directly, tells a parable of man whose land was producing abundantly and the man decided that he needed to pull down his present barns and build a bigger one to store his grain...

His stuff...

Doesn't that sound familiar?

When we first start out living on our own, most of us don't have much stuff... and gradually it accumulates... some of it necessary for living, but much of it not.

Anybody here familiar with comedian George Carlin and his s monologue on 'stuff?'

He talks about accumulating stuff... and how we work to get more stuff and we work to look after our stuff and we buy a security system to protect our stuff and we are still afraid to leave town for fear someone will steal our stuff, and we need bigger and bigger houses to put all our stuff in... he goes on for quite some time... but he ends with these rather profound words, "And when you die, your stuff becomes someone else's junk."

Jesus and George are cautioning us to be on our guard not to have our possessions own us.

Both Jesus and George, in their very different ways, are saying that there are more things important than the accumulation of stuff.

This flies in the face of our consumer society, in which every day we are bombarded with messages that tell us to buy this and we will be happy...

If only we have the right car... the latest iPod... the phone with the most features, we will feel fulfilled... and buy it now... no money down... no payments for a year...

In fact, by the time many people starting paying for their stuff, it is already outdated...

What more and more people are realizing though is that happiness cannot be bought... there may be the momentary satisfaction but it is fleeting at best.

And we are also awakening to the effect that all our stuff is having on our environment and its ability to sustain life.

I am no more immune to this urge to accumulate than the next person... I have been resisting buying a Netbook for months!

I don't need one... I have not one, but TWO laptops, both of which serve my needs quite well.

But need has very little to do with the accumulation of stuff.

A couple more stories about stuff...

This gospel reading is particularly pertinent to those of us who might be downsizing or whose parents have reached the stage of their lives in which they are downsizing and they are faced with all the 'stuff' that people gather over the years and there is no room for them in their new place.

My parents did that a couple of years ago when they moved from their house into an apartment.

My sisters and I all wanted this one cabinet that my mother has had since she was a girl... we had to draw for it...

Did any of us need it? No.

Do I even have room for it?

No.

But I wanted it!

As it turned out, I didn't get it either.

Aside from the warning against accumulating more stuff, the gospel has a couple of other messages.

After he states his intention to build his bigger barns, the man in the parable says, "I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."

Is that the only time we should do those things?

When we have enough stuff stored?

What about celebrating in whatever circumstances we find ourselves?

What about being present to the many demonstrations of God's presence in the midst of our daily lives...in the midst of our accumulation...

What about being rich toward God, rather than store up treasures for ourselves?

I don't think being rich towards God means giving everything you own to the church... but I do believe it is asking us to reorient ourselves from being consumers of those things that can never deeply satisfy to living out our deepest values as members of the Body of Christ...

Being rich toward God is loving God, loving your neighbour as yourself... right here in the midst of our daily lives.

Because when it comes down to it, we are not judged by what we have, but by what we do with what we have... We are not our possessions, we are our relationships.

Money and possessions cannot guarantee health or love or kindness.

And I think that this is a good thing.

If they could provide all that, what need would we have for God, or for each other?

When it comes right down to it, God won't ask what kind of cars we drove, but God will ask how many people we drove who didn't have transportation.

God won't ask the square footage of our houses but God will ask how many people we welcomed into our homes.

God won't ask about the clothes we had in our closets, but God will ask how many we helped clothe.

God won't ask what kinds of exotic food we were able to put in our fridges, but God will ask us if we shared our food with those who don't have enough.

God won't ask how many material possessions we had, but God will ask if they dictated our lives. (internet, source unknown)

When God asks, what will our answer be?

To be all honour and glory, world without end, amen.