

## **SERMON - BIGGER BARNES - Luke 12:16-21, November 19, 2017**

There has always been much debate in secular governmental politics about which system of government is the best. In theory, the goal is to adhere to a system that would best promote economic growth and employment and eliminate poverty as much as possible. There are some who adhere to Capitalism, which promotes private industry and the ownership of private property, a form of which is practiced here in the United States of America. There are others who swear by Socialism. In Russia, after the Revolution, a government developed which claimed to follow the ideals of Karl Marx and Communism, which in theory would spread wealth and property based on where there is need as equally as possible amongst all of its citizens and everything would be owned in common. The reality of what transpired in Russia, however, was not even close to this ideal. Although Soviet Communism eventually collapsed in Russia, a similar form of it is still practiced today in China, North Korea and in some other countries. There are some people who don't believe in any form of government at all and prefer anarchy instead. We do a great job inventing various and diverse theories, philosophies and opinions about how we should govern ourselves, and the debate will continue until the end of time. Like my philosophy professor in college told us, "You pay your money and take your choice."

Whatever form of government one might prefer, the fact is that even though there is so much wealth and technological advance in the world today, there are still masses of people who die daily; naked, starving and sick with illnesses that were conquered by medical science long ago. If you visit any major city in the US, you will see people living in the street, in cardboard boxes, and keeping their meager possessions and empty soda bottles in a push cart. When I visited Savannah, Georgia for the first time, I saw an entire community of indigents living in tents under the Savannah bridge, entire families of men, women, and children.

Jesus taught us to love God above all things and to love our neighbor more than ourselves. Jesus taught the haves to share as much as they can with the have nots. Jesus revealed to us that on Judgement day God will ask us if we clothed the naked and fed the hungry. St. John Chrysostom taught that if we own anything above what we need, it was as if we were robbing the poor. If the majority of people adhered to the teachings of our Lord, then poverty would no longer exist. No political theory or philosophy is going to save mankind. The bottom line is that only the Lord and the Word of God can save us.

In the Gospel there is much said about rich and powerful folk who abuse, ignore and take advantage of poor and weak folk. In today's Gospel a wealthy entrepreneur amasses an overload of grain. He has so much grain that he doesn't need this abundance and he can remain more than wealthy without it. He can't possibly use it because he has so much and doesn't even know what to do with it. Instead of considering the less fortunate who are hungry and starving, he gets the brilliant idea to build bigger barns to store all of his excess. He doesn't even consider to share one speck of grain with the poor. He behaves just like the rich man who would come and go and step over poor homeless Lazarus who lay ill and starving at the rich man's doorstep. Sadly, it is because people are like this that there is still poverty in the world. Sadly so many of us, no matter how much we have, we are never satisfied, and we always crave more and more. There are degrees of giving and sharing. A wealthy man can give a tithe to the Temple, but Jesus gave more value to the one coin that the poor widow gave to the Temple. The wealthy man gave out of his abundance and hardly felt a pinch when he gave. The poor widow gave much, because that solitary coin was all she had and she gave out of the abundance of her heart.

During the Christmas season the classic movie "It's a Wonderful Life" with Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed is always shown. We have all seen this movie a hundred times and practically

know the dialog and scenes by heart. Yet, no matter how many times we've seen this movie, we can still sit down and watch it and enjoy it every time. No matter how long ago it was made, it still strikes a chord in our hearts and is just as relevant today as it was when it was first filmed. What is it about this movie that makes it timeless and so special, endearing and lovable? The movie shows us in a contemporary setting how a small family can say no to wealth and power and say yes to self-sacrifice and a small broken down Savings and Loan Company in order that needy families and people can escape poverty and live in dignity. Mr. and Mrs. Bailey take less so that others may have more. We can choose to be like George and Mary Bailey and sacrifice and take less so that the suffering, helpless, needy and downtrodden can have more and live in dignity, or we can be like Mr. Potter, played by the actor Lionel Barrymore: cold, calculating, strictly business, a modern day Scrooge, pinching every penny and only living for personal gain at the expense of others. We see in the movie what Bedford Falls would be like if it turned into Pottersville. God has given us the power to make this world like Bedford Falls or like Pottersville. A life lived selfishly will never be happy, but a life of self-sacrifice, love and generosity will result in the happiness that God desires for all of us. Amen.