



St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Delray Beach, Florida  
10 Pentecost - Proper 13 - Year C (RCL) - July 31/August 1, 2010  
Hosea 11:1-11; Ps. 107:1-9, 43; **Luke 12:13 - 21**  
Preacher: The Reverend Canon William H. Stokes, *Preacher*

### ***Carpe Diem - Is that Luke's meaning?***

*Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions...*" Luke 12:15

"*Carpe Diem!*" "*Seize the day*" today's Gospel seems to say to us.... The phrase "*Carpe Diem*" is from Horace's *Odes*...The phrase is part of the longer "*Carpe diem quam minime credula postero*" - "Seize the day, trusting as little as possible in the future." According to my favorite online source, *Wikipedia*, "The odes says that the future is unknowable, and that instead one should scale back one's hopes to a brief future, and drink one's wine."<sup>1</sup>

Although the English word, "seize" is most often used when translating the phrase, which seems to me to give it a tenor of desperation, many agree that a better translation of Horace would be "pluck" the day with an understanding that each day is to be savored and enjoyed.

There are those who understand the phrase, *Carpe Diem* as an excuse for recklessness and profligacy, for self-indulgence without any boundaries or limitations....This is perhaps best captured in the old bumper sticker, "The one with the most toys wins!" As Christians we have to reject this. Today's gospel makes that clear. Today's gospel reading is found only in chapter 12 of Luke. You won't find these verses in Matthew, Mark or John.<sup>2</sup>

In Luke's Gospel, a question from a disgruntled brother in a crowd surrounding Jesus is joined to a parable about a rich person. It might be observed that we're in no position to draw any conclusions about the rightfulness or wrongfulness of the disgruntled brother's claim to a larger portion of an inheritance. Apparently it is not especially relevant. Jesus refuses to get hooked into the conflict. But as Luke tells it, Jesus doesn't just ignore the situation altogether. He sees in the disgruntled brother's question a deeper issue – an issue about "wanting stuff." That's a problem that cuts across the ages.

Jesus turns to the crowd, and says to them, "*Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions*" (Luke 12:15). Jesus then tells the parable about the wealthy man who stores up his possessions for himself. Here Jesus is not condemning the wealth of the man so much as he is his selfishness.

Preacher and Biblical scholar Fred Craddock clarifies the issue when he writes, "...[The] craving to hoard not only puts goods in the place of God...but is an act of total disregard for the needs of others.... He is a fool, says the parable. He lives completely for himself, he talks to himself, he plans for himself, he congratulates himself. His sudden death proves him to have

lived his life as a fool. *'For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?'*<sup>3</sup>

But his foolishness goes beyond this. The verses which immediately follow this parable, verses which were not appointed as a part of our Gospel reading today, are also a key to the parable's interpretation, *"He said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing....Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?...And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying....Instead,' Jesus says, 'strive for God's kingdom and these things will be given you as well'"* (Luke 12:22 – 24, 25, 29, 31).

There is real value in Jesus' words. How often we worry about the small stuff, oftentimes make ourselves sick over it. How many times have we each obsessed over some concern we thought was huge in magnitude, lost sleep over it, only to find out it really wasn't such a big deal. I know I've done that a lot in my life.

How often it happens that we worry about the details of day to day living and mundane matters of life in a way that is way out of proportion and then suddenly find ourselves confronted by something of real magnitude which puts everything else into its true perspective; something that brings real life and authentic living into sharp relief. Those who have received a life-threatening medical diagnosis, or had a loved-one receive a life threatening diagnosis, understand this well.

Yes, there is genuine wisdom in what Jesus says and, especially I think, if we hear his words in the same spirit in which Horace wrote, *Carpe Diem...* "Pluck" the day....enjoy the day...take each day in stride.... stop worrying so much....look at the birds; enjoy the flowers; enjoy one another and the love of those God has placed in your midst. Yes, these things are of enormous value.

On the other hand, it is also true that there are times when we do not worry enough. Perhaps there is something going on with our body and we ignore it, deny it, instead of going to the doctor and getting it checked out. That happens a lot. There are other ways in which we don't worry enough.

This past Wednesday, some of us gathered to discuss Thomas Friedman's important book *Hot, Flat and Crowded: Why we need a Green Revolution and how it can renew America.*<sup>4</sup> I am a fan of Thomas Friedman who is a regular columnist in the *New York Times*.

Friedman embraces globalization and the market economy. I think he has been on message for years. In *Hot, Flat and Crowded* I believe he is a prophetic voice crying in the wilderness; a wilderness that is being increasingly depleted and polluted. *"Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions,"* Jesus says (Luke 12:15). That's a message that has rung hollow in too many quarters of our society.

We are the world's largest consumers and for years this has been coming home to roost. In *Hot, Flat and Crowded*, Friedman makes an interesting correlation between the financial crisis we are in and the environmental crisis marked by global warming caused by carbon emissions and greenhouse gases, which objective evidence makes increasingly clear is not a theory, but a scientific fact.<sup>5</sup>

Friedman writes, *"I am not against global trade and economic growth, but our growth needs to be more balanced – economically and ecologically. We cannot just be the consumer and China the producer and neither of us can allow the goods produced and consumed to be made or used in ways that harm the environment on the scale we have been. This way of*

*growing standards of living is simply unsustainable – economically unsustainable and ecologically unsustainable.*<sup>6</sup>

Friedman names 5 key problems that we face:

- 1) Growing demand for ever scarcer energy supplies and natural resources.
- 2) A massive transfer of wealth to oil-rich countries and their petrodictators.
- 3) Disruptive climate change.
- 4) Energy poverty which is sharply dividing the world into electricity haves and electricity have nots.
- 5) Rapidly accelerating biodiversity loss, as plants and animals go extinct at record rates.<sup>7</sup>

In one section of *Hot, Flat and Crowded* Friedman addresses a mentality that has dominated our thinking – the mentality of *IBG - YBG - I'll be gone - you'll be gone!*<sup>8</sup> It's about privatizing gains and socializing losses.<sup>9</sup> He applies this to the financial meltdown, in which a few greedy hands made enormous fortunes taking gigantic and reckless risks -- privatized gains, put it in their pockets, and then, when it fell apart, as it inevitably had to, the loss was socialized – through corporate bailouts and strategies which you and I are now paying for through our tax dollars and for which our children will to pay. Those who gained kept their money; their gain was our loss.

We as Americans have been doing that globally....20% of the world's population, primarily the western world and most notably Americans, consume 80 percent of the world's natural resources. We have depleted the resources and privatized the gain; the socialized loss is to the entire planet. But in the dominant mentality of our culture, who cares? When the oil runs out, or the planet is too hot for life, *IBG - YBG - I'll be gone, you'll be gone - so what? Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die.*

Needless to say, this is not the way we should think as Christians or as human beings. We and we alone, as human beings, have been entrusted with the stewardship of creation...God has given us dominion, power, over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon earth...over all of life.<sup>10</sup> Right now, we are killing much of it.

We, and we alone, created in the likeness and image of God, and most especially with our powers of creative reasoning, have the capacity to right the current wrongs, and to turn the current situation around. And I believe Thomas Friedman makes a compelling case that this will, in the long run, revive this country's economy and ecology.<sup>11</sup>

Friedman makes the strong case, and one with which I agree, that as Americans, we should be in the forefront of Green Innovation and implementation and that this would both serve our economic growth and provide jobs, and provide for the health and well-being of the planet. Instead we lag behind. He tells a compelling story of a Green business, a solar energy corporation that got off the ground in Ohio, which so desperately needs job, but which could not get the support and economic incentives it needed in this country. This company moved to Germany, where the government was willing to provide the incentives.<sup>12</sup> The factories they built and the jobs that came with them went from Ohio to Germany, where it is now a multi-million Euro business. Friedman provocatively asks, "Are you crying yet?"<sup>13</sup>

It will take enormous resolve and national will to turn this ship around...It will take courage and wisdom to stand up to those who have a vested interest and spend obscene amounts of money lobbying at the state and federal level for their own interests; who tell public lies in order to sustain their private gains and an unsustainable status quo that continues to harm our

economy, our security, our health and our ecology...It will also take sacrifice, genuine sacrifice, and that is something we seem to know little about in too many quarters today.

But sacrifice for the sake of others is at the heart of the Christian gospel. Striving for the kingdom of God is striving for a world in which all people, not just a few, have the freedom and resources to live happy, healthy, abundant lives, to thrive; that's God's dream for us; that's God's hope. That's what God wanted when he gave us dominion of this Creation – over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air and over every living thing.

Think you can't or don't need to make a difference? Think again.

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<sup>1</sup> See Wikipedia - "Carpe Diem" at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpe\\_Diem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpe_Diem)

<sup>2</sup> Similar verses about a disgruntled brother and a wealthy man are found in 72:1-3 and 63:1-4 respectively of the extracanonical Gospel of Thomas which was among the *Nag Hammadi* documents discovered in Upper Egypt in 1945. See [http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gth\\_pat\\_rob.htm](http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gth_pat_rob.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Craddock, Fred B. *Luke: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990) p. 163.

<sup>4</sup> Friedman, Thomas L. *Hot, Flat and Crowded: Why we need a Green Revolution and how it can renew America-Release 2.0 – Updated and Expanded* (New York: Picador/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009)

<sup>5</sup> The 2009 State of the Climate Report issued by The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (N.O.A.A.) on July 28, 2010 provides in arguable evidence supported by 300 international scientists that the current decade is the hottest in recorded history and that this is part of a pattern on increasingly record setting decades in sequence, caused largely by the carbon emissions. See

[http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2010/20100728\\_stateoftheclimate.html](http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2010/20100728_stateoftheclimate.html)

<sup>6</sup> Friedman, p. 6

<sup>7</sup> Friedman, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> Friedman, p. 16 ff.

<sup>9</sup> See Friedman, p. 18 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1:28

<sup>11</sup> This is a sustained argument throughout much of Friedman's *Hot, Flat and Crowded*, but see especially Chapter 10 "Green is the New Red, White and Blue."

<sup>12</sup> Friedman's account of the start-up of First Solar Inc. of Toledo, Ohio is found on p. 448 -453.

<sup>13</sup> Friedman, p. 53.