

## Scripture and Sermon for July 31, 2016

### Hosea 11:1-11

When Israel was a child,  
I loved him,  
and out of Egypt  
I called my son.  
The more I called them,  
the more they went from me;  
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,  
and offering incense to idols.

Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,  
I took them up in my arms;  
but they did not know  
that I healed them.

I led them with cords of human kindness,  
with bands of love.  
I was to them like those  
who lift infants to their cheeks.  
I bent down to them  
and fed them.

They shall return to the land of Egypt,  
and Assyria shall be their king,  
because they have refused  
to return to me.

The sword rages in their cities,  
it consumes their oracle-priests,  
and devours because of their schemes.

My people are bent on turning away from me.  
To the Most High they call,  
but he does not raise them up at all.

How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
How can I hand you over, O Israel?  
How can I make you like Admah?  
How can I treat you like Zeboim?

My heart recoils within me;  
my compassion grows warm and tender.  
I will not execute my fierce anger;  
I will not again destroy Ephraim;  
for I am God and no mortal,  
the Holy One in your midst,  
and I will not come in wrath.

They shall go after the Lord,  
who roars like a lion; when he roars,  
his children shall come trembling from the west.

They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,  
and like doves from the land of Assyria;  
and I will return them to their homes, says the Lord.

### **Luke 12:13-21**

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich

man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God."

Let us pray...Amen.

Our Gospel lesson this morning seems rather pointed about the difference between material things, and spiritual things.

Of course, we are bound to be interested in the material aspects of our lives, aren't we? We are, in fact, made of stuff. We wear stuff to cover our bodies, we live in houses to shelter ourselves (and our stuff). But for all our worries about our stuff, for all our worries about the material aspects of our lives, how much stuff do we actually take with us when we die? None. Zero, Zip, Nada.

When I was about 10, my mom took my brother and I to a huge flea market in Keene, New Hampshire. It was centered around a huge barn, the outside packed with antique furniture, homemade foods and crafts, and the inside had all kinds of merchants selling all kinds of things. In the lower level of the barn, I found a stall that sold coins. And I was in heaven! I had some allowance money with me, and I decided right then and there that I was going to collect coins! Not just any coins, I wanted to collect foreign coins, and I wanted a full collection of every country's coins!

So 3 or 4 times a summer, we'd go to this flea market, and I would wisely invest my hard earned allowance money on some of the coolest foreign coins I could find. Some were in sleeves, so they could be protected. Some were from my favorite part of the stall, the "bucket", where hundreds of mixed coins from all over the world could be sorted through, and purchased for just a few cents per coin!

In the winter, I would bring out my collection, in a big album, with a page of coins for each different country. And sometime around my 15<sup>th</sup> birthday it occurred to me that there was no way I was going to be able to collect a full set of coins from every country in the world, so I thought I would have my collection appraised by the owner of the coin stall at the flea market the next summer. Imagine my disappointment when the owner offered me \$20.00 for the whole collection! I had easily spent close to a \$100 dollars over 5 years, plus hour and hours of sorting, categorizing, and labeling my coins. I went back home deeply saddened that I could neither successfully achieve my goal, nor get any value out of my collection.

A friend of mine is a funeral director. Energetic, competent, and a true professional, he and his wife lived up the hill from me in Camillus. I would drive by his house, and I would see him playing baseball with his son, or washing his car, or mowing the lawn. His wife brought his son into the Nursery school that rents from Fairmount Community Church, and I would say hi each morning they arrived.

They became pregnant with their daughter, their son moved on to Kindergarten, and they decided that their 'simple' house up the hill was too small for their growing family.

My friend was excited to tell me that he and his wife were building a new house in an up and coming section of Camillus, much bigger, and with all the newest appliances and gadgets.

After moving in, and having their daughter, they became pregnant with their third child, another boy, and with his birth, they decided they were probably done with having children.

I did a funeral two weeks ago, and I asked him how things were going. He said, Gary, we really regret selling our house and moving. Our taxes are so high, the mortgage is killing us, we can't go on vacation, we can barely pay our car payments...we're stuck, cause we need the room, but we can't really afford to stay, either.

Our gospel lesson rather pointedly demands that we be cautious around being too focused on our material possessions. Of course, we must feed and clothe ourselves, we must provide shelter for ourselves and our families. But to be so focused on these things that we exclude the spiritual nature of our lives is idolatrous.

Baptisms occur with water, on the forehead. But while that water will dry, a baptism is for eternity. Our communion celebrations take place with bread and juice. Christ's material body, broken for us, and his life-blood, shed for us. The symbols we use, bread and juice, are consumed and gone, but the grace we receive, the spiritual aspects of the Lord's Supper remain upon us for eternity.

The message we hear from our Gospel lesson and our Epistle lesson are not unknown to us, but because of our very material nature, they are difficult to hear, difficult to act upon.

Families continue to get baptized, and baptize their children, in faith, and in hope, aiming for the spiritual aspects of life in direct conflict with the values that drive our society. In a way, baptizing a child in today's day and age is an act of societal disobedience!

So too is taking communion. To prayerfully receive the elements of communion, the body and blood of Christ, in all their symbolic glory, in a time and age when so much emphasis is placed on the material, on the literal, it's downright radical!

Jesus used his dramatic speech to make a point. The Apostle, Paul used his dramatic writing to make a point. They knew the truth about the necessity of the spiritual aspects of our lives, and the emptiness of a life based on the material, and they wanted those around them, and the faithful of the future to know about them too.

How well do you think the messages have been received?

What can we do to find ways to emphasize the higher, more spiritual aspects of our lives, and spend less time worrying about the material aspects of our lives?

What can we do to resist the siren call of advertising and peer pressure that suggests we are better people when we drive the right car, wear the right clothes, use the right deodorant?

How can we teach our children, our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren that a fascination with the material is understandable, but ultimately unsatisfying? That paying attention to the spiritual aspects of our lives can be deeply satisfying?

It starts with how we prioritize our own lives, doesn't it? It begins when we detach ourselves from worrying about how things look, or what people will say, or what people will think of us if we put less emphasis on our material lives, and more emphasis on our spiritual lives.

It starts with being prepared to stand out a little bit, and being willing to defend a way of life that challenges the status quo.

It might mean resisting the pleas for that sweater, or that game, or that piece of electronic equipment, because everyone else has one...

But ultimately, our children, our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren will come to know whether or not we practice what we preach. They are very astute at detecting hypocrisy, aren't they?

It won't do for us to preach Christ's message while indulging in a buffet of material goods ourselves. That will only drive our children and our grandchildren further from the church, and further from developing their own spiritual lives. It will only do for them to see us struggle too, to see us sacrifice too, to see us prioritize in a way that is consistent with the Gospel.

Celebrations like baptisms and communion services give me hope. Our sacraments aren't empty actions, they are deeply respected and beloved symbols of our spiritual lives together. They feed us, they sustain us, and they cause us to think about our spirits, and about the spiritual aspects of our lives. They have meaning no matter what we collect, no matter what kind of house or apartment we live in.

I give thanks for the Sacraments we share together, and hope and pray that you will leave here today more emboldened to prioritize your lives in a way that lessens your dependency on the material, and increases your awareness of the spiritual.

Amen.