

Sermon#1 Me, My, Mine

Psalm 24:1

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.

A very successful lawyer parked his brand-new Mercedes in front of his office, ready to show it off to his colleagues. As he got out, a truck passed too close and completely tore the door off of the driver's side. The attorney immediately grabbed his cell phone, dialed 911, and within minutes a policeman pulled up.

Before the officer had a chance to ask any questions, the lawyer started screaming hysterically. His Mercedes, which he had just picked up the day before, was now completely ruined and would never be the same, no matter what the body shop did to it.

When the lawyer finally wound down from his ranting and raving, the police officer shook his head in disgust and disbelief. "I can't believe how materialistic you lawyers are," he said. "You are so focused on your possessions that you don't notice anything else."

"How can you say such a thing?" asked the lawyer.

The cop replied, "Don't you know that your left arm is missing from the elbow down? It must have been torn off when the truck hit you."

"Ahhh!" screamed the lawyer. "Where's my Rolex!"

Do you ever feel possessed by your possessions?

What do you own?

What belongs to you?

Let me ask that first question again, Do you ever feel possessed by your possessions?

A monk found a precious stone, a precious jewel. A short time later, the monk met a traveler, who said he was hungry and asked the monk if he would share some of his provisions. When the monk opened his bag, the traveler saw the precious stone and, on an impulse, asked the monk if he could have it. Amazingly, the monk gave the traveler the stone. The traveler departed quickly, overjoyed with his new possession. However, a few days later, he came back, searching for the monk. He returned the stone to the monk and made a request: "Please give me something more valuable, more precious than this stone. Please give me that which enabled you to give me this precious stone!"

What do we own and what owns us?

Or better yet, do we really own anything? Yes, we may have a title to our property, our home? We may have title to our vehicles? Yes, we may have accumulated a lot of stuff over the years, but is what we have really ours?

The Psalmist says, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." If that's the case, if the Psalmist is correct, you and I own absolutely nothing. Zero. Nada.

About a year and a half ago I started begging---begging, pleading with, schmoozing up to Mary Lou Paul, that is, about a year and a half ago I started petitioning Mary Lou for one of her world famous Coconut Cakes. Hey, my momma taught me it didn't hurt to beg, I mean, it didn't hurt to ask. Sure enough, I pestered Mary Lou long enough until she made me that coconut cake. When Mary Lou presented her dessert masterpiece to me she told me to share it with Vicky and Will. To which I said, "I'm not sharing it with anyone. It's mine."

I shouldn't have said that. I really shouldn't have said that because when I got home and Victoria saw the cake she told me, O.K. she ordered me, she commanded me to put the cake in the freezer because I didn't need it, and second, we were going to use it when the Wedgewood Christians came over to our house for our Christmas shindig. I had to wait three months to eat a piece of the cake that I mistakenly thought was mine, all mine.

Is what you have really yours?

Andrew Carnegie was once visited by an ardent socialist who spoke at great length about the evils of capitalism and its tendency to generate inequality. Carnegie finally called his secretary and asked for two numbers: his estimated net worth and the approximate global population.

"Give this gentlemen 16 cents," he then instructed her. "That's his share of my wealth."

It was a stinging response, but in 1889, shortly before he retired and sold his steel company, Carnegie wrote *The Gospel of Wealth*, in which he asserted that all personal wealth beyond that required to supply the needs of one's family should be regarded as a trust fund to be administered for the benefit of the community. And so Carnegie set about disposing of his fortune through innumerable personal gifts and through the establishment of various trusts.

Me, my, mine. What if mine is yours and yours is mine and ours is theirs and theirs is ours? What if the Psalmist had it right? The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.

I know, I know, the fourth of July is just around the corner, our celebration of the United States including our hallowed concept of private ownership. Go on. Hear the fireworks: pop, bam, kazoom. The U.S., the happy mistress of capitalism. Work hard. Make money. Buy what you want. It's yours baby. All yours.

To be fair, I agree with William Gates Sr. who is co-chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and I concur with Chuck Collins, co-founder of United for a Fair Economy and Responsible Wealth who note that liberalism in the last century was tempted to become the civil religion of socialism that reverences state ownership. Gates and Collins go on to observe, however, that conservative Christianity today has enshrined private ownership. But what, they ask, what if words like ownership fly in the face of kingdom of God values? What if people of God are called to value community (meaning seeing beyond the individual to the communal), and called to value fellowship (which means sharing, holding in common with the community,

not grasping as "mine!"), and called to value mission (meaning our participation in God's projects in God's world for God's purposes). Gates and Collins ask, Could there be a biblical stewardship that celebrates and acknowledges God's ultimate ownership?

I'm going to read this to you one more time because I know you have as much trouble hearing as I do. Psalm 24:1, The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it. Which means----which means we don't really own or possess anything, and that includes--- mark this down---that includes the United States. Our own country is not even ours. Keep that in mind as you watch the July 4th fireworks show.

Sermon #2 Come Hell Or High Water

Exodus 3:7-8a

Exodus 14:21-22

On this July 4th weekend in which we celebrate our freedom it is important to observe that our second and third scripture lessons teach us that God leads the way to freedom. Now the freedom God leads to is not---is not the freedom to do what we want to do or freedom to have what we want to have. No, the freedom God leads to is freedom from slavery, freedom from poverty, freedom from bondage, freedom from hell. Or put another way, come hell or high water, God will make a way out of no way. And it is interesting to note that God will send those who are struggling to survive to a land flowing with what?-----to a land flowing with milk and honey. God did that for the Hebrews and God has been doing that for the down and out ever since. God is doing that even today. God is doing that for Hispanics right now, right here.

Please don't be confused and please don't think the immigration issue has been settled with the defeat of President Bush's proposal. Yes,----yes, I finally agreed with George on something, even if our agreement may have been because of different reasons. I agreed with President Bush and supported the legislation because best I can tell God has sent all the Latinos to the United States. I know, I know, the natives---well, they actually aren't the real natives, the Indians are the real natives and we are the immigrants, but back to my point---I know many U.S. citizens are now up in arms and want the Latinos sent back. They are saying the immigration bill in congress is amnesty; that it's wrong. Like the Egyptians noticed the Hebrews had become too numerous, they have noticed, in their estimation, that way too many Latinos have taken up residence in the United States and it's messing up our July 4th. It's messing up our way of life, they say. And the Latinos should all be sent back and border fences should be erected and border patrols should be increased and all the latest and greatest technology at our disposal should be used to keep the varmints out. But what they don't realize is that God sent the Latinos here. What they don't understand is that just as God sent the Hebrews into a land that was inhabited and was flowing with milk and honey God is sending people today struggling to survive to places where people have it much better, to places where some folk, in fact, are filthy rich, living high on the hog, as we say in the south. What they don't realize is that the earth is the Lord's, and that includes the portion of the earth know as the U.S. of A.

Over vacation I read a book by Heidi Neumark who is Pastor of Transfiguration Lutheran Church in the South Bronx. Neumark spends much of her time with folk who don't know where the next meal is coming from. And a good part of her congregation is Hispanic. She ministers to human beings who live ten to a room, who have friends who can't even get a room but rent beds for eight-hour shifts.

This is what Pastor Heidi says: There are borders that should be battered, breached, bent, and burned because they leave billions of people in misery.

Let me tell you something. God will not----God will not leave billions of people in misery and let our nation enjoy the good life.

Rev. Neumark observes that when John of Patmos envisioned the new Jerusalem from his island exile he wrote in Revelation of a holy city where the gates are never shut by day and there will be no night. (Revelation 21:25) No locks, no gates, no borders.

Don't you love it when liberal preachers quote the Bible!

July 4th. Oh, we're going to do us some good eating on July 4th aren't we! July 4th will be just one more example of how blessed we are. But if we take seriously our scripture lessons July 4th will also be a time to be aware of God's children, no matter their nationality, who live in poverty.

Today is communion Sunday and I want to tell you about a song that goes like this. It's a Negro spiritual.

We're gonna sit at the Welcome Table.

We're gonna sit at the Welcome Table one of these days, Hallelujah!

No more hunger 'round that table. . .all God's children 'round that table.

Gonna sit down at the welcome table, going to feast off milk and honey.

It's the Lord's table. It's not our table. It's the Lord's table. And that's why all are welcome and why all have to be fed. Mark this down. Come hell or high water God's going to get everybody to the table.