

A priest and the pastor from the local Baptist Church were standing by the side of the highway – with a sign that read, **“The end is near – turn yourself around now --- before it’s too late.”**

They planned to hold up the sign to each passing car. As the first one whizzed by – they heard the driver shout, “leave us alone you religious nuts!”

From around the curve they heard screeching tires and a big splash.

“Do you think” said the Baptist pastor, “we would be better off with a sign that just read, ‘Bridge Out Ahead?’”

“The end is near – turn yourself around now before it is too late” ---- could be a catch phrase for today’s readings – or perhaps, “life is too short – so don’t sweat the small stuff.”

A man who felt that he was being cheated out of his inheritance approached Jesus. Jesus knew his job was about something of much greater importance than a few gold and silver coins. Jesus came to announce that God is inviting us to be part of God’s kingdom – a kingdom that is not completely of this world – a kingdom that will be more wonderful than anything we could ever imagine.

The man, and all those listening to Jesus, needed to be reminded about what is really important in life. So Jesus said to them, “ a person’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

Do you think this was a reminder only for the wealthy? It’s a reminder to everyone. Anyone can get caught in the trap of thinking that having more and more things is what makes life worthwhile.

Certainly wealth keeps food on the table and a roof over our heads. If we don’t have enough wealth to meet our own basic needs, life can be a bit miserable. That’s why Jesus constantly insists that his followers care for the poor and the needy – so they can have the basic needs of life met.

Jesus even invited some to give away everything they had to the poor and then to follow after him. And many through the ages have done that very thing. But not everyone can do that – nor is everyone called to do it.

In this world we have to provide for our needs and the needs of our families. That’s why God has blessed us with gifts and talents to use to go out and find employment. But we cannot forget that our greatest need to is to be in relationship with God.

Apparently, that’s what the man who had a great harvest and wanted to build bigger barns to hold it – forgot.

He thought security, independence, and the power and influence that came with great wealth – were his for many more years, forgetting that one’s greatest security is found in God.

Jesus calls the man in the parable a fool – for he grew rich in ways that in the end, really don’t matter at all. Remember – as Jesus tells this story, he is on his way to Jerusalem – knowing full well what awaited him there – his own suffering and death – and so he certainly knew that growing rich in good works and in the love of God and God’s kingdom is what really matters.

I don’t think any of us like to be reminded of just how fragile our life is – that it can be taken from us at any time. We like the illusion of being in control and of calling the shots. Jesus is really doing us a favor by reminding us that our life in this world is only temporary, and life in the world to come is for eternity. Jesus is doing us a favor because he is trying to keep us rooted in reality. The things of this world are only of secondary importance and we must USE them as the WAY to him and a WAY to help build the kingdom – and not allow them to be central in our life.

St. Paul, in today’s second reading, calls greed “idolatry” for greed makes wealth and possessions our primary goal in life and THAT can tempt us to set aside the goal for which we were created – life lived for and with God.

So as I draw to a close – a thank you for being here today. By your presence you ARE saying that your relationship with God is important. . . but doing that in here is the easy part ---- it is living life with the right priorities the rest of the week when we are not here – that is the more difficult part.

So one more story to drive home the point. . .

An American tourist traveling in Europe, visited a wise and famous rabbi living in Austria. The American was surprised when she saw how simply the man lived – in a single room, with a table and chair, and a few books.

“Rabbi”, she asked, “is this all you have?” “Why yes,” he said. “Because when all is said and done, I’m just passing through – on my way to more glorious things.”

And that’s how we need to live our lives – knowing that we are just passing through – on our way to more glorious things. . .