

**Find the Cost of Freedom (with Kudos to Stephen Stills) — Luke 11:1-4;**

**Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV –**

**4 August 2013 – 11th Sunday after Pentecost**

**11:1** Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” **2** And he said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

**3** Give us each day our daily bread,

**4** and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation.”

**12:13** Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” **14** But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” **15** 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.” **16** Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. **17** And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ **18** 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. **19** And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ **20** 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?’ **21** So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.”

**Arley began working at Stewart Industries just two days after Victoria did.**

They had been in the same training class. Victoria had fallen in love with Arley probably sometime within that first week. Arley used to reciprocate her attention, but he was more interested in career than relationship. There was plenty of time for that later. Right now, he wanted to advance his career more than anything.

Over the course of the next five years, Arley was successful in his efforts; Victoria – not so much. He advanced in the company. She did, as well, but not nearly so quickly. That, in part, was because she was more willing to make Arley look good than to promote herself. As he rose on the Stewart Industries corporate ladder, he showed Victoria less and less interest. She continued to dote on him.

One day, in an officers’ staff meeting (he was a senior officer; she was a junior officer) the boss asked for volunteers to lead a special project. Arley saw this as a chance to make a big jump in success: he volunteered. Victoria saw this as a chance to work closely again with Arley: she volunteered.

Over the course of the special project, Arley always postured himself to take credit for the outcome of the operation. Victoria always played the supporting role. Even though many of the creative ideas used were originally hers, she was fine to let Arley take the credit. They worked well together as a team, with one exception: Arley never was able to see Victoria as the person who loved him; he could only see her as a competitor in a world of limited resources.

He was a career advancer; she was a relationships person. The staff they managed tended to admire her and would do almost anything for her. The same staff felt like Arley was on their side only when it was for his own benefit; they had a notion that he would throw any of them under the bus if it would be to his advantage.

The project was going very well. Arley knew that a reward would be coming. But he also detected that the staff were more supportive of Victoria than of him. Rather than seeing how well they worked together, all he could see was how she was competition, in a world of limited resources. He began to work secretly to undercut her.

Dan Stewart, the third generation CEO of Stewart Industries had made a lot of money, as had his father and grandmother. He took a special interest in the project that Arley and Victoria were

running. He understood quite well the importance of relationships and trust in any successful organization – be it family or business. He began to look more carefully at how they were working together in their leadership.

Dan Stewart thought he recognized what was going on, so he decided to create a scenario to test his hypothesis. He generated a phony crisis as the test. He called both Arley and Victoria into his office to explain how this crisis had come about on their shift. Victoria was prompt to talk up Arley’s expert leadership throughout the whole process.

Arley never had any reason to doubt Victoria; she had supported him from the day he began to work for Stewart Industries. But he could not see relationships, nor their worth. For him it was all about bottom line. He simply could not bring himself to trust her. He was fearful that the “crisis” was real and that some heads would have to roll. He would not allow his to be one of them. He threw Victoria under the bus; he worked surreptitiously to make the crisis seem to be her fault.

He just couldn’t help himself. He had to take care of business. And business was taking care of himself.

Dan Stewart was impressed, as he pushed the hypothesis forward. Victoria continued to support the company by supporting her co-workers. Arley continued to support himself by denigrating his co-workers. Dan Stewart was finally satisfied that he had clearly been successful in testing the mettle of his leadership team.

Arley never knew what hit him, nor why. If only he could have opened his eyes toward the value of relationships, he might have learned to trust.

## SECOND STORY

Robert was a hard working accountant. He put in long hours, on behalf of his clients. He liked what he did, and he liked the security it provided him. Over the years, his income grew well. He provided more and more financial security for his family. He worked hard; he made good money. As time passed, he bought a bigger house and more expensive cars. He, his wife, and their three children all dressed the part of a successful family. To the outside world, they seemed like the model family.

The more he worked, and the more money he made, the more solid was their security – or so, it seemed to Robert.

The only problem for Robert, and for his family, was that they *thought* they had a good firm grip on what made life secure. What they *didn’t realize* was that **LIFE IS FAR TOO BIG TO GET HUMAN HANDS AROUND.**

Robert had taught them all to be so **SELF-sufficient**, that when tragedy hit, and their self-resources could not buy them relief, they had nowhere to turn. Their bank account was full; they had trusted in it. But they had not invested much in their relationship with God. They went to church; they had provided a good “tip” to the church in their giving. They had even been semi-active in taking leadership roles.

But it was no more than just *“doing their part.”* They had **never learned to trust in God, because they never needed God.** They were in charge of their lives; God was merely a control valve on their morality. Or, that’s what they thought.

They were good people, except that they only trusted in themselves.

Robert had started it all. He had **chosen the road of self-sufficiency.** Unfortunately Robert’s children had only seen the role modeling he had provided. They didn’t know that God could be trusted.

It did not end well for these pretty people, as they continued to thrash about in the ocean of their unforeseen tragedy, grasping only at their own devices.

It's easy to pick on Arley and Robert, to lambast them for being silly, for having their priorities in the wrong place.

**But they're not so much different from us. Let's face it: most Americans worship the god of self-sufficiency. Christianity is growing in poor countries where self-sufficiency is not worshipped. Look at what's going on in this country. It's not so much a lack of morality as it is a lack of dependency.**

**It's very hard not to buy into what the "common sense" around us tells us will provide us with security. We have grown up kneeling before the altar of self-sufficiency.**

I have this little motor scooter – called a "Honda Elite." Some of you have seen it. I got it two years ago, and it's such great fun to ride around town – not over 52 mph, but 100 mpg. Some of my clergy friends who have big Harley Davidson motorcycles have made little jokes – you know: "PeeWee Herman" references. But it's OK. It's what I wanted.

Only bad thing is that it's so very, very lightweight. It only weighs as much as the guy who sits on it. I've got friends who tell me that a heavier motorcycle would be safer.

Honda also makes a "Silver Wing" – it's like my "Elite" but weighs twice as much, has six times as big an engine, and goes ... well, significantly faster. It's like my Honda "Elite" scooter, on steroids.

If I had one of those, nobody would call me Pee Wee Herman. I mean, it would be so much safer. It would be all the motor scooter I would ever need.

I just happened to accidentally stumble across an eBay listing about a week ago for a Honda Silver Wing -- the same model year and same mileage as my little "Elite." And it was priced – well, it was just ridiculous how cheap it was at that time. No one had bid on it for three days. There were only two days left. I contacted the dealer who was selling it. And yes, he would offer me a very attractive trade in for my little Honda Elite.

Hmmm. Jane seemed to think that this was not a wise expenditure of our resources; she strongly encouraged me not to buy this. I nodded in her direction and mumbled.

I just looked. I did not make a bid. (The secret to winning eBay is to make a good bid that ought to win the item for sale, in the last three seconds of the auction, not giving anyone a chance to outbid you. I know; I've done it quite a few times.)

The auction ended Thursday evening. It was now Monday. No new bids. Tuesday: no new bids. Tuesday afternoon, I reviewed my sermon notes for today.

***The object of greed can never be met, because one who is greedy projects that the object can give happiness or secure life. No object has that power. No object can ever provide lasting satisfaction. Every object coveted, and then obtained, will ALWAYS fail to keep the person satisfied. Greed eats, and eats, but is never satisfied.***

OK, I don't really need that motor scooter. I'm not going to bid on it. That settles it.

Wednesday morning – I wonder if anyone else made a bid. I'm not going to, but it can't hurt just to see what others have done.

***Lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil.***

OK, the best way to avoid doing the wrong thing is to not expose yourself to the temptation.

**“Hmmm. Nobody else bid on this. Good thing I’m not going to bid on it.”** I said it, but I didn’t really believe it.

***You know, in the parable in today’s Gospel, it is the ONLY one of Jesus’ parables -- in all four Gospels -- where God actually has a speaking part:***

***<sup>20</sup>“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?’ <sup>21</sup>So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.”***

Alright, it begins to irritate me when sermon preparation starts to interfere with my own life. I’m not sure if it were my sermon preparation on Wednesday morning that conditioned me to hear a voice in my spiritual ear that said,

***“You fool! Quit praying the Lord’s Prayer and then insisting on tempting yourself. You’ve got a track record. You can withstand almost anything except temptation.”***

OK. OK. I need to pray. ***“God, please deliver me from temptation. Help me to let go of this thing that I don’t need, and which I ought not buy. Really I mean it. Please help me, God. Really! ... I mean it.”***

I finished my prayer time, showered, got dressed, and was almost out the door. OK just one more peek, to see the Silver Wing for one last time, and then I’m never going to look at it again.

***Holy Cow! The auction was ended 36 hours early by the seller. No explanation was given. It was just over. Withdrawn. Nobody could bid on it***

***Really! I said looking up at my ceiling. Really?!***

OK. That kind of took me by surprise. ***“Why?”*** you ask; ***“isn’t that what you prayed for, Monty?”***

***Well, yes. But. ... I mean I prayed for help with my weak flesh ... and ... yeah, I know, if I’d not look at the eBay auction, I wouldn’t have even known ... so I’m a temptationally challenged person, who sometimes needs some extra help.***

I’m not going to try to explain how the prayer thing worked. I just know that something good happened, and I ended up just offering a prayer of thanksgiving, without understanding it.

I do know this.

(1) Whenever we lust after some material thing, or material security, satisfaction of that lust will never be sufficient.

(2) Whenever we lust after some material thing, or material security, we are falling into step with what our culture teaches us is “common sense.”

(3) Whenever we lust after some material thing, or material security, we most often are able to rationalize it out to convince ourselves that it’s the right thing to do.

(4) We are all products of our culture, so beating ourselves up with a guilt trip won’t do a whole lot of good, not in the long run.

(5) HOWEVER, if we don’t name it for what it is, we will never ask God to help us overcome the teaching of the world and begin to grow towards what Jesus taught us the Kingdom of God is all about – on earth as it is in heaven.

(6) The only way we can ever move in that direction is to name it for what it is and then to pray God to help us. Otherwise, we will just say in our minds and hearts: nice job preacher, but now it's time for us to go to the "real world."

(7) Wherever we put our trust, there will be our bank account; wherever we put our bank account, there will be our trust. No way around it. And when it gets down to it ... whom do you really trust?

I'm still growing. I'm not there, but I'm getting closer. How about you?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.