

May the Word of Christ dwell richly in us,
and may the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. Amen.

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus,
“Teacher, tell my brother
to divide the family inheritance with me.”

Someone in a courtroom says to the judge,
“Your Honor, order that doctor
to pay me for my malpractice claim.”

Someone in a business office says to the manager,
“Boss, tell the company to give me a raise.”

I suspect that there are very few among us
who haven't voiced our own version of the request
that was put to Jesus in today's Gospel reading:
“Teacher, tell my brother
to divide the family inheritance with me”.

But Jesus wouldn't touch it;
Jesus wouldn't get near the request.

Instead, Jesus turned the conversation on its ear by telling a story -
the story of the rich man and his abundant possessions.
And, ... Jesus called that rich man a fool.

By our lights, the rich man in the story wasn't a fool at all,
but rather a forward-looking and responsible steward
of all that he produced.

By our lights, the man in today's Gospel,
should have received his share of his inheritance,
just as damaged patients should receive their malpractice awards,
and employees should get their well-earned raises.

But Jesus ignored that man's request for justice.
And when Jesus told the parable

and called the rich man a fool,
he said, in essence, that God's notion of justice
is different than ours.
Friends' Jesus said,
you're playing by the wrong rules,
rules that are, as Ecclesiastes suggests,
vanity and a chasing after wind.
The rules that matter,
the rules that aren't vanity and a chasing after wind,
are God's rules.

Now we don't understand God's rules completely.
But we certainly can understand that by God's rules
what matters is not how we human beings
understand and define justice,
but how God defines justice.
God's rules ... not our rules.

By that standard - God's notion of justice -
Jesus says that it is not now much we store up that matters,
but how we use whatever we've been given.
And that standard is applied
not so much tomorrow or next week or in our wills,
but today.
It is today that our lives are being demanded.

Today, August the first, in the year of our Lord 2010,
lives are being demanded in a very particular way
here at Saint Ann's
as the parish prepares to welcome into its midst
a new Rector,
and begin a new chapter as the Body of Christ
at this particular time
and in this particular place.

Today, as you prepare to launch a new relationship
it is indeed a time of opportunity.
In today's Epistle reading, from Colossians,
Paul has some very specific thoughts
about taking advantage of such an opportunity.

Get rid of anger, wrath, and malice, Paul urges.

Do not lie to one another.

And on a more positive note,

Paul directs us to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness,
humility, meekness, and patience,
and to bear with one another,
as we clothe ourselves with love.

The inheritance that matters, as Jesus knew so well,

cannot be stored up;

and it need not be arbitrated by civil judges or bosses;

and it will not be divided among the heirs;

because the inheritance that matters isn't a matter of rights.

The inheritance that matters – our real abundance – is a gift.

And it's been offered to all of us,

through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For Christ's sake, for our sake,

let us strive after God's notions of justice, not our own.

Let us indeed clothe ourselves with

compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

And our inheritance, our real abundance,

is that the peace of Christ will rule in our hearts,

that the Word of Christ will dwell in us richly.

Amen.