

The week started off with a literal “wake-up call” early Monday morning from our daughter, Brittany. Now to place this call of distress in context--a few years ago a psychologist friend of mine did Myers Briggs testing on the four members of our immediate family, and all of us, except for Brittany, tested out as “feeling deciders.” Brittany is a “thinking decider” and this means that among other things she’s less emotional about things than the rest of the family. But Monday morning, Brittany was emotional. The previous Friday she and a group of friends witnessed as two friends’ little dog leapt from arms that held her safe and dash into the spokes of a passing car. The little dog died in the laps of Brittany and her friend on the way to the ER.

In that instance, the fragility of life became “up front and personal.” Brittany asked me, “How can this happen?” One minute a group of friends are having a fun conversation on the sidewalk; the next minute there are screams of horror and pain. One of life’s most important lessons is that life is indeed fragile and every moment is to be cherished because it will never come again. Hopefully, our lives have many cherished moments; and those we love, be they human or beloved pets, will have many moments of bliss, but the way the world is we can not place our trust in the longevity of life (although in this congregation it might appear otherwise!).

So who you gonna trust? In whom do we place our hopes, our dreams, our deepest meaning for life? That’s what this Bible text is all about. It’s interesting that Jesus just doesn’t answer the question from “someone in the crowd” about arbitrating his family’s inheritance. In those days, the oldest son received half of the inheritance and the rest was divided equally. Now you first children might like this idea, but we second children do not think it is very fair. But Jesus sees something much more important at stake and that is the question: what has hold of our hearts and in what or in whom do we place our trust? So this is the question Jesus chooses to address.

You know the Bible story. The guy has a bountiful harvest; he gets more and more stuff to take care of and to protect. His stocks multiply and the more he has the more opportunity he has to acquire more wealth. He gets rich enough that he can retire early and play golf every day while watching his wealth multiply. But just at the moment when his heart can rest easy in his accumulated riches, God says “no.” And so it is that security cannot be bought by any amount of money.

This is a hard lesson for those of us who have lived “on the edge” whether it is because of a general depression that some of you experienced or because of just the circumstances life has brought us. Once one has been hungry or seen widespread hunger it is hard to not hoard. In fact, aren’t we told to keep a reserve on hand for emergencies? I do this! Because I want enough food for my family and some to share. And I’m also a very good bargain shopper. I know how to multiply the savings so as to get more bang for my buck! But I confess that these money saving activities feel at times like a desperate act of securing stuff that I might need to survive in the future. Over the past years I’ve gotten better, because I certainly should know where true security and trust must rest. But I still have an enhanced anxiety gene, and the reptilian part of my brain, that constantly watches for danger lurking just around the corner, kicks in more than I’d like to admit.

Thank God, God gives us another vision of living, an alternative to fear. God beckons us to trust in the love that is what the famous theologian, Tillich, would name "the ground of being." Later theologians would use the phrase, "the creative responsive love of the universe." Words fail us, even the "word" God is too small, to fully understand that which sustains what is good and creative and meaningful in the world in which we live. But we know in our deepest hearts that there is more than "stuff" that keeps us alive both in body and soul. No one need tell us there is "nothingness," because we know better. We sense it in the love we share with each other; we see it in acts of kindness and goodness. There is a love that extends beyond ourselves; we humans are capable and yes, we often do, give love asking for nothing in return and out of a simple longing to spin outward into the world the Godness that God places within our hearts as a sign and seal of the Holy One who is the only One in whom we can truly place our trust and our security.

If our wealth (and most of us here are wealthy by world standards) can be used to enhance our well-being, than it can mostly do this by our giving it away. It is such a joy for me to now be able to be generous in ways I couldn't be for many years. When our wealth can be used to build relationships than our whole world is a stronger and safer place in which to live because it is relationships rooted in a common Creator that is the ground of being tying us together, that is the Godness to which wealth can make a contribution.

Well, Monday morning, after Brittany's phone call and because her friend had promised to help her move, and now was incapacitated by grief, Tom and I flew to Chicago to spend Tues., Wed., and Thurs., helping her move from one apartment to another, and in the process, being with her and giving her support. But I suspect that this is not the last time, Brittany will ask the question, "How can this happen?" because life does this to us. And she and we will be reminded that the greatest wealth is to be rich toward God, and the place to put our trust is in the One who created us and loves us with a great love, a love that knows no beginning and no end.