

Ron Wayne was one of the founders of Apple, along with Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. He helped to steer the computer company in its early days, and he even had a hand in designing the famous Apple logo. Wayne owned ten percent of the company, while Jobs and Wozniak each owned forty five percent. But Wayne decided to hand back his stake, fearing that he would be liable for a portion of a \$15,000 loan if the company went under.

Apple succeeded, of course, and if Wayne had held on to his stake it would now be worth billions. Wow, after hearing this number many of us may be thinking to ourselves does he have any regrets? Surprisingly, he doesn't. Ron informed author James Thomson of the online publication SmartCompany, "I made my decision on the information I had at the time, I've got my health, my family and my integrity -- and that is the best fortune you could ask for." So, do you believe him? Imagine the possibility of having BILLIONS of dollars -- and no regrets? Hmmm.

In our Gospel story this morning, Jesus tells the story of a rich man who was "dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day." The man dies, is buried, and finds himself in Hades being tormented. Similar to our response of hearing about Ron's lost fortune, we may wonder, does the Rich man in today's narrative have any regrets? Jesus certainly implies that he does. But none of his regrets involve a poor business decision or a missed opportunity to make money. He does not say, "I should have held on to my ten percent stake in that apple orchard!" In the first century, like the 21st, everyone seems to want an apple! No, the rich man's regrets seem to go in a different direction, one that matches a trend we are seeing today.

A nurse named Bronnie Ware specializing in care of terminally ill patients has recorded the most common regrets of the dying, and there's no mention of missed business deals. No regrets about skipped bungee jumping opportunities, or

even about marriage -- despite the many jokes that link regret to our choice of a mate. According to one, a woman inserts an ad in the classifieds: "Husband wanted." The next day, she receives a hundred letters. They all say the same thing: "You can have mine."

No, the top five regrets discovered by the nurse from least to greatest include: 5: *I wish that I had let myself be happier.* People admit that they feared change in their lives, so they pretended that they were content. In fact, they wish they had laughed more and allowed themselves to be sillier. 4: *I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.* People feel badly that they were so caught up in their own lives that they let important friendships slip away. 3: *I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.* Many people suppress their feelings in order to keep peace with others. 2: *I wish I hadn't worked so hard.* This regret was expressed by every male patient. Every single one of them.

And the number one big regret, discovered by nurse Ware and reported in a British newspaper called *The Guardian*: "I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me." That is the most common regret of all. "Most people had not honored even a half of their dreams," says Ware, "and had to die knowing that it was due to choices they had made, or not made." So, do any of these big regrets ring true for you? What regrets would you have if this were your last day on earth?

In Luke's Gospel this morning Jesus tells us that the rich man was not alone in his life, nor was he alone in his death. "At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores." And although Lazarus may have had some regrets, they probably did not include number 5: *I wish that I had let myself be happier.*

The life of Lazarus was, in the words of philosopher Thomas Hobbes, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." For Lazarus, happiness was not a choice. It was a scrap from the rich man's table, which never came. Jesus informs us that "the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried." And when he arrives at his final destination, Hades, we begin to get a sense that the rich man has some regrets.

Regret Number 1. *I wish that I had cared for the people around me.* The poor man Lazarus was lying at his gate, covered with sores, every single day, and the rich man stepped over or around him each time he left his home. Every single day, the rich man missed a chance to help Lazarus and he could have done so by simply giving him the leftovers from his table.

Regret Number 2. *I wish that I had listened to Moses and the prophets.* The rich man realizes in death that he had not paid attention to the word of God as it came through Moses, "you shall love your neighbor as you love yourself." He had not heeded the prophet Isaiah, who commanded, "share your bread with the hungry ... bring the homeless poor into your house."

Regret Number 3. *I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.* Every day, the rich man ignored poor Lazarus, fully aware of the teachings of Moses and the prophets. But he didn't have the courage to live a life of integrity, one in which his actions were in line with what he observed and what he believed. The rich man in Jesus' story saw the poor man and knew that Moses and the prophets commanded him to help. But he did nothing!

The rich man fell into a trap set by people of his day, who blamed Lazarus for his poverty, insisting that he must be lazy or morally deficient. It isn't hard for us to imagine the people sitting around the rich man's table saying things like, "God rewards goodness and punishes wickedness -- it's always been that way! So, dress lavishly and eat sumptuously. You deserve it! You earned it!"

In Hades, the rich man feels a big regret. He says to Abraham, "I beg you to send [Lazarus] to my father's house -- for I have five brothers -- that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment." The rich man cares deeply for his brothers; so apparently, he is not a man without feelings after all.

Now, while the dead man's care and concern for his family might seem a bit surprising, especially considering his treatment of a poor beggar he saw every day, Abraham's response isn't all that surprising. He replies, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them." Yes, that's right (!), the rich man realizes, as the lightbulb appears above his head, and everything becomes crystal clear for him. And in his newly found clarity he realizes that Moses and the prophets had not been enough for him. "No, Father Abraham," he pleads; "but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." Surely, they will turn their lives around if dead Lazarus comes back to life and warns them! Shaking his head, Abraham responds to the man's request, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

Of course, this morning Abraham is talking to us, right along with the rich man and his brothers. Which begs the question, are we convinced? Would we be persuaded to change our ways if someone actually rose from the dead? What do you think? Jesus has risen, but you could probably say that we still have some regrets right?

Now, let me be clear: None of us is perfect, and we will all come to the end of life feeling that we have made mistakes along the way. There will most likely be choices we feel badly about, alongside opportunities we wish we had seized. But what would it mean for us to die with *no big regrets*? The top regrets of the rich man can teach us the lessons that we -- like his five brothers -- need to learn. We don't want to arrive at our deathbed saying: *I wish that I had cared for the people*

around me. I wish that I had listened to Moses, the prophets, and Jesus. I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, in which my actions were in line with my beliefs.

Thankfully we are not yet in the afterlife, calling out to Father Abraham. We are not stuck in a place of regret feeling pangs of guilt that we did not do enough, that we did not do more, that we did not choose wisely, that we did not have enough time. As long as we are breathing, we can choose to care for the people around us, we can choose to listen intently to the teachings of the Bible, and we can choose to live a life that is true to our deepest convictions. If we do this, more than likely we'll have no big regrets.

The wonderful, and good news, we receive from our Gospel this morning, is that our choices do not always have to be large to be life-changing. The rich man in our story could have simply shared some of his food with Lazarus, in order to care for the people around him. In the same way, hunger in America, for example, which **cannot** be eliminated without broad institutional initiatives, must also be addressed on a personal and relational level. Community food banks, summer lunch programs, and hot meals for the homeless function in this way, bringing together the haves and the have-nots, in places where relationships can develop. Hunger in America might not be eliminated without government intervention, but the hungry person or persons on our street corners can be fed, even it is done with one sandwich at a time.

Putting our actions in line with our beliefs -- living a life of integrity -- is a change that is made one choice at a time. A former council president from my previous congregation used to always ask the members and friends of the church, "What is one small thing can you do this week that will bring someone closer to Christ?" He did that each time he made an announcement at worship. Which leads me to wonder, if we intentionally try to follow that advice, and if we seek to follow

the commands of Moses and Jesus to love others, the result is a life we can't possibly regret! And Thanks be to God for that. Amen.