

A Parable for Today - *Priceless Treasure*
Greed & Mercy - Based upon I Kings 21:1-20 and
Matthew 5:1-12a

March 19, 2006 – 3rd Sunday of Lent

Rev. Mark Seifried at Townsend
Congregational Church, UCC

Gary grew up in a quiet New England town not far from here. Gary's parents were well-respected citizens of Beaver Brook. His dad was a selectman for the town and a deacon of Friends Church. He was an insurance broker for a large firm in Boomtown. His mom was a department manager for the Town of Beaver Brook. She served on the Friends Church Altar Guild, sang in the choir and was active in the Women's Fellowship of the church. Gary spent his early years with many days and nights running around the big old Friends Church building.

When Gary was old enough, his parents sent him to prep school which was fine with him. Gary was independent minded and got along well with most anyone. Unlike others, Gary didn't have a bit of trouble adapting to dorm life and the strict rules of Brady School. He had become accustomed to being left with babysitters, family and church members while his parents went away on long weekends, business trips and vacations. The main difference was that he missed the kids from church.

Well, between Gary's third and fourth year at prep school, his parents decided it might be best for Gary to stay with his Uncle Roy and Aunt Mary while they went to Germany on vacation. His Dad thought that Uncle Roy could teach Gary about hard work and something about nature. While Gary's parents were in Germany, they would pick out their new Mercedes Benz that would be freighted right to their home in Beaver Brook. They made this trip and bought a new Benz every four years. The selection of the car must have been the highlight of their trip because no matter where Gary was, whether at a family or church members' house, his parents would always call to report on the features of the new car. Even before they returned to Beaver Brook, it seemed

that almost everyone in town knew about the car that would arrive soon.

That year was a little different for Gary because after Aunt Mary got off the phone with Gary's mother, she reported the deluxe features of the new Mercedes to Uncle Roy. Before she could even get through the kind of leather on the seats and interior wood paneling, Uncle Roy began cursing and said he didn't care about their car, their vacation, the big boat they bought in the spring, the new spa in their 4500 square-foot home, their custom made Italian shoes, their Hummer and Range Rover, their state of the art home entertainment theater, their season tickets to the Boom Town opera, or membership at the country club. The list was pretty long because Uncle Roy used a different expletive for each item on the list and half way through used words and phrases that Gary had never heard.

Gary enjoyed the next two weeks enough with his aunt and uncle. They were fun to be with. It was the first time Gary was ever asked to help with chores anywhere. Gary got to help in the garden and chicken house. He was never so tired in his life than the three days he helped Uncle Roy build a new tool shed. His body felt tired, but he looked forward to hearing Uncle Roy tell his stories. His beliefs seemed to be a lot different than his father's. Gary asked Aunt Mary once if it was because they were Catholic that they saw things differently and she said, "maybe a little, but mostly its just a different way of knowing the world." She told Gary that his father saw the world in black and white and that she and Uncle Roy saw things as mostly shades of gray.

Gary didn't understand so asked Aunt Mary for an example. She said, "Well, for example, your father is a hardworking man and is faithful to First Church. Lord knows he gives a lot, but he makes a lot, too." She said that she didn't want to talk badly about him, but she thought it was strange how he was always quoting the Bible when it came to the way other people lived, but she didn't see him doing half the thinking about himself as he did others. Gary remembered his Dad praising Pastor Gleason's sermon on righteousness and clean living the same day he was meeting with a few other men from the church to talk about zoning to keep the riff-raff out of the center of town. He remembered hearing his Dad say, those people are better off in Hapsburg where they can get their free medical care and go to the food pantry. He said no one

would understand them in Beaver Brook because to his knowledge no one spoke Spanish, Chinese or Zulu.

When Gary's parents returned from Germany, they were both very happy. His Mom had bought several new outfits and some new crystal glassware. She was having several cases of Delft china shipped, too. His Dad thought she shopped too much because they had to bring back two extra bags than they left with. Mom said he was one to talk. Wait till Gary saw the new electric powered louvered shades that would arrive in a few weeks for every one of the 46 windows on the house.

Two days after their return, Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. Gary was in church that Sunday when Pastor Gleason preached a long time about the mighty justice of God. He said in his prayer though that even though New Orleans was paying for its sinful ways, the church should help out and pray for all those half-naked children who might never find their parents. The next day, Gary had heard about a big fundraiser at another church, St. Luke's across town, and those church members housing some of the people who had lost their homes. He asked his parents if they were sending money or maybe helping a family by letting them use the wing over the kitchen where they never spent time. His mom said, "I don't think so honey. I have so much stored in those rooms and nowhere to move things. Besides, we don't know what kind of people they might be. They'd probably be poor and very uncomfortable in a house like this. The government will get them a trailer and they can stay down there. Before you know it, they'll have roofs back over their heads and the whole world will forget all about it." When he asked his Dad about sending some money, he said, "Do you know how much we just spent in Germany? We have a new Mercedes on the way and I still have to pay for your tuition at Brady. Do you think money just grows on trees? That hurricane is going to cause gas and oil prices to go up and it'll hit us hard. I can hardly afford to keep up this house much less help some indigent strangers stay in a hotel for a month."

Gary went back to school the next week and they all lived the rest of their days according to the blessings they had received.