

## Securing Your Future

I like action movies. One that I particularly like is the 2024 film *The Beekeeper*. In the movie, a former operative of a clandestine organization known as the “Beekeepers” is drawn back into action after a close friend, a retired schoolteacher, falls victim to a phishing scam and commits suicide after losing all her money. Adam Clay, the Beekeeper played by Jason Statham, embarks on a brutal campaign of vengeance against those responsible, uncovering a vast conspiracy of national implications.

The film delivers a message about the importance of justice, particularly for weak and vulnerable people targeted by scams and frauds. It portrays the scammers as mostly young, bright men and women, but without a conscience or any sense of right and wrong.

*The Beekeeper* resonates with audiences because the story line is so true to life. If you are a senior, you probably have been warned by the AARP or Medicare to beware of scams – Medicare scams, credit card scams, health scams. There are unscrupulous people out there who have no compunction about preying on the elderly and finding ways to steal their money. They are truly despicable people.

In our gospel today, we meet a man who is determined to get all he can out of life. In fact, he’s nothing more than a little sleaze – a dishonest, self-serving crook. But he’s more than a crook – he’s a wheeler and dealer – a hustler who is always trying to get something more out of someone else. If you fire this guy, he’ll file a complaint with the labor board. He’ll try to squeeze all he can out of you. Forget integrity or honesty or character.

So, in our gospel story, when he gets his termination notice, he doesn’t apologize or even attempt to make restitution for the money he stole. Instead, he asks, “What am I to do? How am I to survive?” You see, there’s no unemployment insurance, no unfair labor practices board, no lawyer to take his case. So, he does the next best thing. He goes to his boss’ creditors and does some more double-dealing, hoping to gain their favor.

If you are in business, you may have come across someone like this man – shady, corrupt, not to be trusted, out only for himself. Such people are

everywhere, even in the most respected institutions, but they have no moral compass, no conscience, no sense of right and wrong.

I love the story about Henry Ford, the inventor of the automobile. He was visiting his family's ancestral village in Ireland when two trustees of the local hospital solicited him for a donation. They talked Ford into giving the hospital \$5,000, which was a great deal of money in the 1930s. The next morning at breakfast Ford opened the daily newspaper to read the banner headline: "American Millionaire Gives \$50,000 to Local Hospital." Ford was outraged. He summoned the two trustees, waved the newspaper in their faces, and demanded, "What does this mean?" The trustees apologized profusely, claiming it had all been a dreadful error. They offered to get the editor to print a retraction the very next day, declaring that the great Henry Ford had given not \$50,000 but only \$5,000. Hearing this, Ford offered them the full \$50,000 under one condition: that the trustees would erect a marble arch at the new hospital entrance, and place upon it a plaque that read, "I walked among you, and you took me in."

The little sleaze in our gospel is such a person. He takes all he can, steals all he can, grabs all he can. You would think Jesus would want to challenge this money-grabbing mentality. We would expect that this little sleaze would be discovered by his boss, who would hand him over to the police where he would rot in jail. God's justice triumphs again! That would be an interesting parable, but it's not the story Jesus tells. Instead, Jesus says that the master called in the little sleaze who has stolen from him and *commends* him! The master tells him that he thinks he is great for behaving as he did! What's more, the gospel says that Jesus commends them both – the master and the crook. What are we moral, upright people to make of this story?

On first reading, it is offensive, isn't it? Here's a story of a little thief who got caught, who realized the precariousness of the situation, and then took drastic, if not criminal action. And the master commends the servant for his savvy. It's a surprising, disrupting way to end the story.

But maybe this is what Jesus wants to do – surprise and disrupt us – because he's making a crucial point. Jesus is essentially saying, "Here is the world's way of doing things. The manager was keen, astute, and shrewd in his dealings to take care of himself." Then Jesus says, "Now, learn an important lesson from a little sleaze. If the people of this world, to secure a temporal future, are willing to expend all their time and talent for insidious purposes,

what should be said of the children of the kingdom who need to secure their eternal future? You need to invest more in eternity than in tomorrow.”

The United States has produced the greatest entrepreneurs in the world. No other nation comes close. Think of all the entrepreneurs in America who are billionaires. There are now over one thousand billionaires in our country – up from three hundred several years ago. Jeff Bezos of Amazon, Bill Gates of Microsoft, Larry Ellison of Oracle, and Elon Musk of Tesla and SpaceX, come to mind. Nvidia, a microchip company, now has a market value of four trillion dollars – more than any other company in the world. Its founder and CEO, Jensen Huang, was born in 1993, and he is now one of the richest men in the world. If Christianity grew at the same rate as Nvidia, every person in the world would now be a Christian. Nvidia and other companies are wildly successful. So, my question is, “What are they doing to grow their businesses that the Church of Jesus Christ is not doing to grow its membership?”

There was an article in the *Harvard Business Review* several years ago with the title, “Can Entrepreneurs Save the World?” I don’t believe they can, but I give them credit for trying. They are people with a passion for their products. But ask yourself, “Where is life leading them? Where are they going? Where will they end up?”

Roberto Goizueta was for many years the Chairman and CEO of Coca-Cola. Under his leadership Coca-Cola was enormously successful, in part because of his passionate commitment to the product. In a speech delivered to the Executive Club of Chicago on November 20, 1996, Roberto Goizueta said:

“At the Coca-Cola Company, we have built and grown for more than 110 years. ...Not long ago, we did some research and came up with an interesting set of facts. A billion hours ago, human life appeared on Earth. A billion minutes ago, Christianity emerged. A billion seconds ago, the Beatles performed on the Ed Sullivan Show. A billion Coca-Colas ago was yesterday morning. And the question we are asking ourselves now is: What must we do to make a billion Coca-Colas ago be this morning?”

As you can tell from his speech, Roberto Goizueta was passionate about Coca-Cola. But what is Coca-Cola? It’s flavored soda water. Roberto Goizueta believed in his product, and he prospered by it. However, a short time after giving that speech, Roberto Goizueta would be diagnosed with

cancer, have painful chemotherapy and eventually die. The redeeming thing about Roberto Goizueta was that he was a devout Roman Catholic and a very generous man – a man who came to this country as a boy from Castro's Cuba to lead one of the premier companies in the United States. Money was not the be-all and end-all, of his life. In fact, his son became a Jesuit priest.

Jesus wants us to think not just about temporal security but eternal security. We need to invest more in eternity more than tomorrow. Otherwise, we will come to the end of our days and be filled with regret for wasting away so much of our life – on focusing on that which passes away rather than on the things that last.

Peter Gomes, the former Dean at Harvard University's Memorial Church, recalled the words of a widow at her husband's funeral. The man had died of cancer in his late forties. She talked about the publications that he had kept by his chair during the final months of his life. She displayed a copy of *Gentlemen's Quarterly* magazine and mentioned all the clothes left in his closet. She showed a catalogue of Porsches and referred to the sports car in the garage. One by one she went through the magazines and books that represented a life of enormous success. Then she explained that as her husband's cancer brought him closer to death, the pile of reading material became shorter, until only his Bible and prayer book were left.

Think about it. If we genuinely believe that life is all about grabbing what we can, we are deluding ourselves. We are like the man who got a seat on the lifeboat as the Titanic was sinking. Just as the boat was about to be lowered into the ocean, a stranger offered him a fistful of money for his seat on the lifeboat. The man in the lifeboat accepted the offer and exchanged seats with the stranger, who handed him all his money. He gave up his seat because he valued the money more than his life, and he went on to drown when the ship sank, with all the money in his pockets. Now here's the question: Did this man have the money or did the money have the man?

Jesus says that we must invest more in eternity than in tomorrow. There are some things that last and some that don't. Some things are of true value and others are only of passing value. There is a time for fun and games and there is a time to be deadly serious about the future.

Rudyard Kipling once told a group of McGill University graduates: "Be certain that you do not care too much for the material, because some day you

will meet someone who does not care for it at all. Then you will recognize how poor you really are.”

That’s good advice, which we in our consumer culture would be wise to heed –invest your life in securing an eternal future. Invest more in eternity than in tomorrow, says Jesus, and you can’t go wrong.

The Rev. Dr. Gary Nicolosi

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Advent Episcopal Church, Sun City West, AZ