
Homily

Five weeks ago the narratives of Luke's gospel invited us to journey with Jesus and his disciples as they travel to Jerusalem. Each of the following Sundays has provided us an opportunity to stop and listen as Jesus teaches those gathered around him what it means to be one of his followers. At the heart of Jesus' teaching is how his disciples, then and now are to live and care for each other in the community he calls into being. Sometimes the stories and teaching have been prompted by his close disciples, at other times by a person in the crowd. Each story shows us the importance of being in relationship with God and with others. Let's remember some of what we have been learning.

When Jesus sends out the seventy missionaries he says travel light; carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, rely on the hospitality given wherever you stay. Unencumbered by possessions frees the missionaries from worrying about things, allowing them to concentrate on spreading the gospel. As they are given hospitality they also learn to show hospitality towards others.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus teaches us that our neighbors are those close to us, as well as those who are different and scary and foreign - our calling is to learn to be compassionate, hospitable and merciful to them all. For the heart of the Torah is learning to love God and to love neighbor.

The story of Martha and Mary teaches us to be both doers and hearers of the word. A follower of Jesus must learn to balance the active and contemplative life, learning to receive as well as to give. The lesson Martha learns is important for us too, teaching us not to be distracted by things that lead us away from God, even when they seem necessary in the moment.

Last week a disciple asked Jesus to teach them to pray. Jesus' model of prayer is one we continue to use today. It is a prayer that we turn to often in our private devotions and in times of need. But also in the Lord's Prayer we find a connection with community. The Lord's Prayer uses the language of first person plural,

Our Father

Give us

Forgive us

Lead us

Deliver us,

These stories remind us to be observant and attentive to the deep connections formed through Jesus, for in him we are united to one another and to all humankind.

The chapter our gospel reading comes from this morning, begins by Luke telling us that large crowds are gathering to listen to Jesus. In fact, the crowd numbers in the thousands, there are so many people that they are trampling one another.

There is an urgency to be near Jesus as he comes near to Jerusalem. Both before and after our periscope Jesus warns his followers that choosing to follow him does not guarantee that the journey will be without risk. However, he tells them not to worry because God is with them to protect and provide for their needs.

It's at this point in the story that an unnamed man asks Jesus to arbitrate a family dispute - a dispute over, of all things, money. It makes me wonder where this man has come from. Is he one of the new arrivals that swell the crowd, coming late in the journey? Has he not heard or not understood what Jesus has been saying? Jesus turns this man's question into another teaching moment. And so Jesus tells another story, one we know as the "Parable of the Rich Fool."

It is a well known story often used during stewardship drives. I like the translation by Clarence Jordan, the Georgia native

and New Testament scholar, founder of the Koinonia community and Habitat for Humanity. In his book *The Cotton Patch Version of Luke and Acts* he translates the parable as follows:

"A certain rich fellow's farm produced well. And he held a meeting with himself and he said, "'What shall I do? I don't have room enough to store my crops.' Then he said, "'Here's what I'll do: I'll tear down my old barns and build some bigger ones in which I'll store all my wheat and produce. And I will say to myself, "'Self, you've got enough stuff stashed away to do you a long time. Recline, dine, wine, and shine!' But God said to him, "'you nitwit, at this very moment your goods are putting the screws on your soul. All these things you've grubbed for, to whom shall they really belong?' That's the way it is with a man who piles up stuff for himself without giving God a thought."

Jordan's translation is actually very close to the Greek in spite of his colloquialism. While the New Revised Standard Version reads, "This night your very life will be demanded from you;" the Greek is literally, "THEY have demanded your life." "They," referring to the rich man's many possessions, are making demands. In the more colorful reading by Jordan he says, ",your goods are putting the screws on your soul," thus robbing him of life.

Jesus tells it straight up, that our possessions make many demands of us. They demand our gifts and talents to work so that we can pay our mortgages and car notes and credit card bills. They demand even more time and attention and often worry, in caring for and maintaining and keeping our property secure. For the fellow in the parable, who has been blessed with a bumper crop, the distraction of planning for his future causes him to forget to give God a single thought! He neglects being rich towards God when everything he has is the result of God having been rich towards him.

Week after week Jesus is teaching us that compassion and mercy, hospitality and faithfulness, come more easily to us when we are attentive to God - when we are not distracted from giving a thought towards God.

In carrying out our mission and ministry we are asked to trust that God will provide the needed material support. And more often than not God provides this support through the generosity of the members of the community of faith.

Sometimes our religious duties and obligations distract us from fulfilling the weightier duty God demands us to give our neighbor. Jesus tells us to be like the Samaritan, not like the Priest and Levite who pass by the wounded in their hurry to be about the busy-ness of religion.

Martha, distracted by her many tasks, is called to a more balanced life. And so we too must monitor how much we do, with how often we think and are attentive to our relationship with God.

When we are rich towards God in prayer, we recognize God as the hallowed One, the object of our prayer and adoration. And we also know God as the One who gives us the bread we need for each day, who forgives us and calls us to be a forgiving people. As we pay attention to God we are led into a new kingdom where justice and mercy and compassion prevail.

Jesus calls us to live into the twin aspects of stewardship: giving thanks to God for all that we have and, in turn, responsibly using and sharing our bounty with those not as blessed as we are. This is where the rich fool fails so miserably, in his schemes to live the good life he forgets to thank God and to care for those less fortunate. When we embrace Jesus' idea of stewardship our lives reflect the heart of Torah; showing love towards God by loving our neighbor in tangible ways. The law and the prophets call us to always act with justice and mercy - to remember and attend to the widow, and the orphan, and the resident alien. When we are distracted by the many demands of life our discernment is clouded, causing us to neglect God and neighbor.

Jesus makes no comment on how many barns we have or how many barns we need - whether they are big barns or small ones. However, the parable does beg the question, do our barns have us, or do we hold them in trust for God? The good things God has given us provide the means for us to bring good to the world. This is our invitation today, to invest in the kingdom of God. That investment begins when we turn our thoughts to God and participate in the life of our community. Together, we help each other stay focused, not to be foolish or, as Clarence Jordan says "nitwits," and to be rich towards others, by showing compassion and mercy, by being champions of justice for all people created in the image of God. As we do this we experience the kingdom that Jesus says is already at hand, and we participate in its ongoing expansion.

Amen.

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