

The Presbyterian Church in Canada
St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

January 26th 2020

Minister: Rev. Dr. Emily Webb

Clerk of Session: Mary Strong

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WE GATHER IN GOD'S PRESENCE

Prelude

*Entry of the Word

Welcome and Announcements

Introit *"Brightest and best are the songs of the morning"*

Call to Worship

*Hymn *"I sing the almighty power of God"* #333

Prayer of Approach and Lord's Prayer

Assurance of Pardon

Minister: The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

People: And also with you.

*Sharing the Peace of Christ *May the God of hope*

*Hymn *"Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine"* #687

WE LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD

Children's Message

Prayer of Illumination

Responsive Psalm #16:1-2, 5-11

Old Testament Lesson:

Isaiah 55:1-5.....Page 685

Large Print Bible.....Page 1152

New Testament Lesson:

Luke 12:13-21,32-34.....Page 74-5

Large Print Bible.....Page 1628-29

Reader: The Word of the Lord

People: Thanks be to God

Anthem *"My Jesus is there"*

Message *"Overpacking"*

WE RESPOND TO GOD

*Hymn *"As the deer"* insert

The Offering

*Doxology *"Praise God from whom all blessings flow"* #830

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

WE ARE SENT OUT AS GOD'S PEOPLE

*Hymn *"Christ is the King"* #612

*Charge and Benediction

*Blessing *"Sing amen"* #264

Sing amen! Amen, we praise your name, O God.

Sing amen! Amen, we praise your name, O God.

Sing amen! Amen, amen, amen, amen,

Amen, we praise your name, O God.

*The Word Goes with Us

Postlude

January 26th 2020 – St Andrew's [Travel Light/Overpacking]

Jesus has been busy.

Having left the roadside rest stop of prayer,
he and his followers have gone back out amongst the crowds,
and then had a tense dinner party
with those experts and teachers of the law,
the Pharisees.

And now, Jesus is back out again among an ever-growing crowd,
so large and agitated that people were trampling on one another
as they circled Jesus and his followers.

Jesus speaks,
and he doesn't go easy on them.
He talks about fear...
what we are afraid of
and shouldn't fear,
and what we aren't afraid of,
but ought to fear.

As Jesus is speaking about not being afraid to stand tall in your faith
and acknowledge your relationship with God
– deep, important stuff –
someone from the crowd says,
“Teacher, tell my brother
to divide the family inheritance with me.”
This is...this is off-topic.

But Jesus is very patient,
and even turns this ridiculous interruption
by a greedy, selfish man
into a teachable moment.

Jesus tells the crowd a parable
about a rich and successful landowner and businessman.
This landowner has a bumper crop one year,
so much so that his barns
– which had, in previous years,
been perfectly adequate to his needs –
can't contain the excess.
So he decides to tear down his old barns
and build new big ones
with capacity to store all his goods and grain.
And he says to himself, I'm set.
I'll have more than enough for many years,

so I can sit back, relax
and eat, drink and be merry.
But God says he is a fool.

It's an odd parable.
It'd be very easy to make a counter-argument
about the rich landowner being a wise and responsible manager.
He'd be someone to admire today;
he worked hard and saved for the future
rather than spending it
on big houses, fast cars
or expensive holidays.
Now he can sit back
and enjoy his retirement years in financial security.

But God says he is a fool.

The rich landowner is not a fool because he's rich.
He's not a fool because he saves his wealth.
And he's not a fool because he didn't know
that he was hours from death;
we're human...we don't know that kind of thing.
He's not a fool because he's human.

When the rich landowner talks in this parable,
he talks only to himself,
and the only person he refers to is himself:

"What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?"
"I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones,
and there I will store all *my* grain and *my* goods.
And I will say to my soul,
'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years;
relax, eat, drink, be merry'"

The rich landowner is a fool
because it's all about him:
his wealth, his actions, his security.

The rich landowner would fit in really well in the 21st century,
practically anywhere in the developed world.
If anything, he might be seen as a bit stodgy,
a bit of a downer and too serious-minded,
since he's so invested in saving for the future

for long-term security,
and not blowing it all at once.

Like the rich landowner,
responsible, sensible people
are encouraged to think about their future
in terms of securing a comfortable lifestyle.
Young people starting out are advised
to dream big and plan careful,
to set goals and build up a financial cushion
to meet their needs
in case of job loss
or a change in health.
Retirement seminars abound,
equating happiness with financial security;
banks and credit unions offer endless advice
on how to save well for that first house,
for retirement, for an unexpected rainy day.

It's not that God doesn't want us to save for retirement or our future needs,
or even that he doesn't want us to eat, drink and be merry;
even Jesus enjoyed time spent at dinner parties and weddings,
and at gatherings with his friends and family.
It's that, sooner or later,
we're going to learn that wealth and property
are really not going to offer us a future,
and that loving those things more than anything else
will only end in loss and fear.
It's about priorities,
and who – or what – is truly God,
truly in charge,
of our lives.
Jesus is calling the crowd and his followers
– and us! –
to consider what we value most.

The rich man's land has produced abundantly,
yet he expresses no sense of gratitude to God
or even to the workers who have helped him with this bumper crop.
He has more grain and goods in storage
than he could ever hope to use,
yet seems to have no thought

of what God might require of him
and no thought of sharing it
with others.
The rich landowner's priority is clear: it's him.
His future security, his future enjoyment, his desires.
He's safe;
he's got everything he needs.
There's no unexpected rainy day that he can't cope with,
he's in charge of his own future now...
...too bad it's only going to last
a few more hours.
Jesus has been talking to the crowd,
answering the question of a greedy man
interested in securing his share of the family estate.
The answer is pretty clear:
life is not defined by what you have,
even if you have a lot.

But then Jesus turns to speak just to his followers, his disciples.
Because the crowd is not made up of followers of Jesus.
They are physically following him around,
pressing close, talking and listening...
but they are the undecided,
when it comes to following Jesus,
to committing
– as the disciples have –
to this new way of living,
thinking
and being human
that Jesus is teaching.

So Jesus answers the crowd,
the undecided,
with this parable.
And then he turns to his followers
and tells them why it's different for them.
Don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes
or if the clothes in your closet are in fashion.
There is far more to your inner life
than the food you put in your stomach,
more to your outer appearance
than the clothes you hang on your body.

Look at the ravens, free and flying,

not tied down to the daily grind,
carefree in the care of God.
And you count far more.
So pack light;
worrying and what if-ing
don't help and you don't need to, anyway.

Basically, relax:
don't be so preoccupied with getting
that you can't respond to God's giving.
What you love the most,
what you value the most,
is what you invest your heart in.

About ten years ago this month,
I was packing my bags to head off to Arizona.
I was not going on vacation,
but on a work-related trip
to make use of some state-of-the-art
scientific laboratory facilities
at Arizona State University.
It was a two-week trip, my first time to the American southwest.
I knew what I needed to pack for work,
and I knew what clothes I'd need to wear in the laboratory.
So that was fine.
I researched the transit system
and booked a motel along the light rail line.

I didn't know much about Arizona,
so I googled things to do and the weather in particular:
warmer than Canada, but not too hot
and likely to be sunny most days;
lots of sightseeing and museums
and outdoor things to do.

So I gleefully ditched the parka and the winter boots,
packed a light jacket, some warm weather clothes,
snacks, my camera, a list of sights to see...
...I even remembered the sunscreen!
And off I went, laden down
with a suitcase, a carry-on,

and backpack stuffed full.
All was well for the first few days.
I settled into my motel, got my transit pass,
and enjoyed the short walk under the orange trees and palms
once I got to the ASU campus.
I discovered new places to eat,
and ventured from Tempe into Phoenix
to explore.
It was pretty wonderful.

And then it started to rain.
And it rained, and rained
and rained.
Three times the average rainfall for the month of January
fell in only a couple of days, over three inches of rain.

The governor declared a state of emergency,
low-lying roads were closed,
parking lots and side streets flooded,
flashflood warnings were issued
because it was raining even harder in the mountains.

For all my carefully researched planning and packing,
I could never have anticipated a torrential downpour
in the desert in January.
I did not pack an umbrella.
Or rain boots.
Or even a jacket with a hood.
As carefully as I had planned for every contingency,
as much as I'd worried over packing just right,
in the end,
I was saved by a kind salesperson at the CVS
digging dusty umbrellas out of storage
for me and a few other foreigners to buy.
So much for planning ahead...I was overpacked for all the wrong what-ifs!

The key to avoid overpacking is not to let the what-ifs get to you.
And that's what Jesus is teaching his followers,
in Galilee then and here to us today.
We can worry and plan and stash away
what we've got for a rainy day;
we can overpack our hearts and our barns
with fear for the future,
fear of failure, of change,

even of success....
and leave little room for faith or hope or love.

I don't want to discourage anyone from reflecting on this parable,
on Jesus' promises to his followers,
for themselves in their own lives.
But I wonder what we can take from it as a congregation,
as a group of Christ-followers
bound together in this place.

As a church, it can be a little harder to trust that God's got this;
that he knows what we need.
And of course, the catch with God is always that
what we need
may not be what we want.

But in seeking the kingdom,
in seeking new and abundant life in Christ
for ourselves and our neighbours,
in living in that new, kingdom way,
we will get what we need.

If it's true that God's got this,
that he's got our church in his care
and knows what we need,
then there's nothing to be afraid of;
if we really believe that,
then we're freed from the tyranny of the what-if,
free from needing to plan for every scenario
and worrying over success or failure.
We are free to answer the question
that underpins Jesus' parable:
what do we value most?
What we have and what we can keep?
Or what we can do for God
with what we've been given?

As followers of Jesus,
we are taught to view ownership differently.
And that's infiltrated our language here at church, too.
We say God has blessed us with something,
or we give back out of what we were given,

during the tithes and offerings.
 We understand that everything we have
 is from God;
 we act as good stewards,
 careful keepers,
 prudent investors,
 of our resources,
 especially as
 a church.

We are taught by Jesus to see what we've got
 – time, talents, resources, even money –
 as something to be used for the kingdom of God.
 If we really believe that and aren't just saying the words,
 then we know that having is not the end goal.
 Using is; giving is.

The rich landowner was a fool
 because he thought that having a full barn was what he needed,
 but what he really needed
 was to see his abundant wealth
 as part of God's abundance,
 to realign his heart away from himself
 and toward God
 and toward his neighbors:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart,
 and your neighbor as yourself.
 That's the fundamental answer to the "how" question of faith
 that we read a couple of weeks ago.
 And now Jesus is adding to that teaching.
 Don't be afraid to stand tall in the faith
 and acknowledge our relationship with God.
 If that's where our treasure is
 – if our treasure is in God –
 then we are called to invest our life,
 invest our heart and all our gifts,
 in that love for God and for others.
 We can't build God's kingdom
 if we're busy building
 a kingdom of our own.

As a church, what have we got?
 What can we do for God with what we've been given?
 What will we invest our heart in? Amen.