

Sermon

“Living in Abundance”

A Sermon for First Presbyterian Church

Sunday, August 4, 2019

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Psa. 107:1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

*2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
those he redeemed from trouble*

*3 and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.*

*Psa. 107:4 Some wandered in desert wastes,
finding no way to an inhabited town;*

*5 hungry and thirsty,
their soul fainted within them.*

*6 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress;*

*7 he led them by a straight way,
until they reached an inhabited town.*

*8 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.*

*9 For he satisfies the thirsty,
and the hungry he fills with good things.*

*Psa. 107:43 Let those who are wise give heed to these things,
and consider the steadfast love of the LORD.*

*Luke 12:13 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my
brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” 14 But he said to him,
“Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” 15 And he
said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed;*

for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” 16 Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ 18 Then he said, ‘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. 19 And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ 20 But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

I. When will enough be enough?

A. Wachovia estate-planning billboard

B. Father Christian at Mepkin Abbey

1. “Your affluence will not make you happy, but it just might keep you comfortably in your unhappiness.”

C. Today we are confronted by Jesus’ parable about the rich fool who finds out too late that he cannot take his affluence with him.

††† But to understand Jesus parable fully, we should pause long enough to consider how Jesus came to tell such a tale.

II. For Jesus, the “Bible” was the Hebrew scriptures

A. One of the central narratives of the Hebrew bible which shapes the people of God is the story of their enslavement in Egypt.

B. It is a story about a rich man (Pharaoh) who has so much harvest he cannot put it all in his barns.

1. The enslavement was for the purpose of building store-cities like Pithom and Ramses. (Exodus 1:11).

C. Even though Pharaoh has this great amount of wealth because God warned him about an upcoming season of drought (Gen 41-ff)

1. It never occurs to him to give some of his excess to help others.

Gen. 47:13 Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe. The land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. 14 Joseph collected all the money to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. 15 When the money from the land of Egypt and from the land of Canaan was spent, all the Egyptians came to Joseph, and said, "Give us food! Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone." 16 And Joseph answered, "Give me your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone." 17 So they brought their livestock to Joseph; and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. That year he supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock. 18 When that year was ended, they came to him the following year, and said to him, "We can not hide from my lord that our money is all spent; and the herds of cattle are my lord's. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. 19 Shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh; just give us seed, so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate."

Gen. 47:20 So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. All the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe upon them; and the land became Pharaoh's. 21 As for the people, he made slaves of them from one end of Egypt to the other. 22 Only the land of the priests

he did not buy; for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh, and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land.

When Jesus tells his parable about a “rich man” who has let his greed overtake his compassion for others and his obedience to God . . . all of his listeners would make the connection to Pharaoh and this central story about how the people of God became enslaved.

III. Jesus is asked to pass judgement about a dispute over an inheritance between two brothers, but he refuses to engage saying,

“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

- A. This warning directly addresses the conflict between two world-views which are both present in the bible and which are still alive and well among us today.**
 - 1. On one side you have Pharaoh, and Solomon, and king Hezekiah, and the rich fool of the parable who live lives governed by the belief that having more will:
 - a. bring you happiness**
 - b. keep you secure****
 - 2. On the other side you have Moses, and in fact *all* the prophets, and Jesus who espouse a life governed by generous “neighborliness.”**
- B. Pharaoh, and Solomon, and Hezekiah, and the rich fool believe that the world only has so many**

resources and path to a satisfied life is to gather and control as many of those resources as possible. It is an economic struggle of all against all where the well-being of others is never understood to be part of one's own well-being.

C. Moses, the prophets, & Jesus believe that (to quote our Psalm from this morning)

*Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.*

9 *For he satisfies the thirsty,
and the hungry he fills with good things.*

a sentiment echoed in Mary's Magnificat

51 *He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.*

52 *He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;*

53 *he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.*

D. For Jesus, and Mary, and the prophets — when the poor and hungry cry out — GOD HEARS THEM.

1. God's response is immediate and generous:

*Some wandered in desert wastes,
finding no way to an inhabited town;
5 hungry and thirsty,
their soul fainted within them.
6 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress;
7 he led them by a straight way,
until they reached an inhabited town.*

The Psalmist concludes:

*Psa. 107:43 Let those who are wise give heed to these things,
and consider the steadfast love of the LORD.*

IV. Jesus, for his part concludes:

20 But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

A. So the natural question that follows is “What does it look like to be ‘rich toward God?’”

1. To be rich toward God is to deploy our resources in ways that look like God’s generosity — to become ambassadors of God’s steadfast loving-kindness.

B. The prophet Jeremiah schools king Hezekiah about this:

*Jer. 22:13 Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness,
and his upper rooms by injustice;
who makes his neighbors work for nothing,
and does not give them their wages;
14 who says, “I will build myself a spacious house
with large upper rooms,”
and who cuts out windows for it,
paneling it with cedar,
and painting it with vermilion.
15 Are you a king
because you compete in cedar?
Did not your father eat and drink
and do justice and righteousness?
Then it was well with him.
16 He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well.
Is not this to know me?
says the LORD.*

C. To know God is to join with God in arranging things so that the poor and marginalized get a fair-

share. Again to quote Moses:

Ex. 22:21 You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. 22 You shall not abuse any widow or orphan.

D. We are careful not to wrong the widows, the orphans, and the resident aliens because we remember that *we were the marginalized once and God rescued us!*

V. We find warnings throughout scripture about the dangers of affluence and the greed which drives us to it.

A. Affluence teaches us that when our box (our grain-storehouses) are full, the answer is to buy more and bigger boxes. “I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones.”

B. Jesus invites us to embark on a life in which we intentionally choose to keep our box as a modest-sized box . . . and when it is full, we let the overflow go on to help others.

Luke 6:38 give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

VI. We gather in worship at a table which points to this kind of intentional poverty:

A. It is set with only the most modest things:

- 1. bread**
- 2. wine/juice.**

B. Everything on the table is “ordinary” AND YET

C. By God’s grace these ordinary things take on extraordinary import in the lives of those fed by

them.

- 1. These ordinary things served as gifts provided by God's love, as it turns out, are more nourishing than of ostentatious excess.**
- D. So let us come and feast in communion with God and with one another and as we receive these simple gifts, let us be wondering about how we will find and live into an abundant life.**

FOR Charge & Benediction:

Prov. 15:17 Better is a dinner of **vegetables where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it.**