

9 Pentecost, Proper 14, Yr.C

August 11, 2019

Luke 12:32-40

*The Hitchhikers Guild to the Galaxy* was popular many years ago and I was very late in reading it. What got me to read it was hearing that there was a question in the book about the meaning of life. And there was. But when the question was asked: what's the meaning of life? The answer given was '42.' In other words, it was a nonsensical question. But I don't think that that's the case. I think it's a question around which we construct our lives. It's the question we're hearing, more than once, in this section of Luke's Gospel.

Last week we heard about the fellow who built bigger barns to store his stuff. This week is a continuation of that discussion. We come in this morning right after Jesus is talking about the birds of the air and the flowers of the fields and the fact that they don't worry about food and clothing. We're supposed to be the same: DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHAT YOU WILL EAT OR WHAT YOU WILL WEAR, Jesus says. Don't get caught up in anxiety about all that. Your father knows you need these things and will provide them. It's the people of the "world," the people without faith, that worry about these things. But you, you have been called to something else. You are meant to seek the Kingdom first and then everything else will follow.

A reminder about this – Jesus is not saying that material things aren't necessary; he's not saying we should be lazy or reckless. He's not saying we shouldn't have earthly treasure. What he IS saying is that because humans are creatures prone to anxiety, it's easy for us to turn earthly treasures into idols, easy for us to be seduced into thinking that they are the most important things because they can provide us with the security that we crave. But they can't, Jesus says, which was the whole point of the scripture about the bigger barns. Riches can be good and wise use of them is clearly good. Use them, Jesus says, but don't put your ultimate security there: that can only be found in God. And don't get trapped into thinking that your worth is dependent upon those earthly treasures,

because your worth comes from only one thing: the fact that you are a beloved child of God. If you think your worth and security are wrapped up in your possessions, you'll end up anxious and worried.

So these readings are about priorities; about getting them right. God wants to give you the kingdom. Don't settle for less. Look there first, figure out what that means, recognize God's generosity toward you and then live out of the trust that generosity inspires. Priorities: they're about making choices. In a light vein, Woody Allen says somewhere that when he was kidnapped, his parents immediately sprang into action – they rented out his room. Much more seriously, I read about a seminar in which people were asked to think carefully about what was most important to them. They were given five 3X5 cards and told to write down their first most important things. Then, when that was finished, they were told to throw away the card that was least important and, then, as you will guess, the next least important, and so on until they were left with the one thing they felt they couldn't live without. If you were to do that, what card would you have left? What is the one thing that gives you that ultimate security, your purpose, the meaning in your life?

Because Jesus was human like us, he understood that we're subject to fear and anxiety – it's part of being human. So, over and over, he reassures us. Here, it's "don't be afraid, little flock." In the New Testament, the root of all evil isn't money, it's FEAR. Fear can make us selfish and blind and cruel. There's much to fear, isn't there? Watch the news, pick up the newspaper. Fear can make us miserable and, at the very least, it can tempt us to lead half-lives because it encourages us to bury our talents, to build those bigger barns, to try to live a life without risk. Remember Jesus saying that perfect love casts out fear? Well, it works the other way, too: Fear can cast out love.

One of the most tragic examples of this in history has to be Martin Luther. He began by empowering the German peasants with his translation of the Scriptures into their language, but he ended up fearing those very peasants – once he had empowered them, he was afraid that they'd rise up and take the power from those who had it and so he supported their bloody

suppression. And he was afraid the Jews in Germany would rise up against the humiliating conditions that were forced upon them and so he wrote with a vicious anti-Semitism that was so powerful it was used to support and fuel the Holocaust 400 years later. And we don't have to look that far afield. Apparently, the man who shot all those people in El Paso was fearful – fear that whites were losing their supremacy in this country. Fear can cast out love.

We can choose. But the collect today recognizes that our choices aren't always the right ones and prays that God will enable us to choose that which accords with God's will. And God's will, Jesus says in Luke, God's good pleasure, is to give us the Kingdom. We're created in such a way that that's where our hearts and our treasure are.

It's not always easy. On the one hand, it's not like when we were kids, we were given a map with a big X marked on it to show where the treasure was to be found. But, on the other hand, we really do know what the Kingdom is about – it's that state of affairs that exists when God's in charge of things. It's that peaceable kingdom that Isaiah talks about, or that's picture in Revelation: no more suffering, no more tears, where everyone is cared for, everyone is loved. I wonder if it's not easier sometimes to look at our world and realize what the kingdom is NOT. It's not what went on last weekend with young men indiscriminately shooting people, it's not kids being wrenched from their parents, it's not lives destroyed by drugs or violence. We know what the Kingdom not.

But I think we also know what it is. Like the people named in the Letter to the Hebrews, we've have glimpses of it, we long for it and we're called to believe in it, not as some kind of fairy-tale belief, but as the kind of belief that means that we trust it, that we trust the God who is leading us towards it. That we trust it and God so much that we're willing to make it the ultimate reality and the ultimate security of our lives.

I've mentioned to some of you that I just finished David Brooks' new book, *The Second Mountain*. While he doesn't use Kingdom language, he might as well have, because he's talking about people who radiate joy, people

who have come to understand life in a way that makes them other-centered, rather than self-centered. He talks about people who find joy and satisfaction in commitment to others. People who, like Abraham and Sarah, hear God's call and change their lives, setting out, as the text says, without knowing for sure where they were going. One such story is about a family whose son, Santi, had a friend named James who sometimes went to bed hungry, so he brought the friend home for dinner and to occasionally sleep over. James also had a friend, who had a friend and that kid had a friend and nowadays, Brooks says there are usually 26 kids at the family dinner table. The book is full of stories like that, of stories about people Brooks calls "weavers" – those who keep knitting the fabric of society together, cementing relationships, responding to needs that are presented to them. One really heart-breaking yet hopeful story he tells is about a program in Ontario called Roots of Empathy which uses babies to help older kids learn about connections. Once a month a parent and an infant visit a classroom; they sit on a blanket and the class gathers around to watch and talk about what the baby is doing. The older kids are learning emotional literacy and learning how deep attachment works. In one class there was an 8<sup>th</sup> grader who the author called Darren, who had witnessed his mother's murder when he was four and who had bounced around the foster care system ever since. He was bigger than everybody else in the class since he was two grades behind. One day, much to everyone's surprise, Darren asked to hold the baby. He looked scary and the mother was a bit hesitant, but she gave him the baby and Darren was great with the infant. He went over to a quiet corner and rocked the infant while the baby snuggled into his chest. After a bit, Darren returned the baby to his mother and asked, "If nobody has ever loved you, do you think you could still be a good father?" Brooks says that that moment was the bloom of empathy and connection, a moment when community begins to heal a wound and create a new possibility. And, yes, it's all of that. But it's also a glimpse of that kingdom, and of the yearning for the kingdom that rests in all our hearts, a glimpse that reminds us who we are and why we are here. One final thought. You'll remember that in the very beginning, Abraham was called to be a blessing. So are we. Amen.