

## ***“Far Enough?”***

Sermon by Rev. Glenn A. Brumbaugh

**Lent 3, Year C,**

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**Colossians 3:1-11 NRSV / Luke 12:13-21 NRSV**

Quite a full barn of crops, isn't it?

Looks like that farmer had a good season and has plenty left over to put up for the winter.

Or she'll have quite the windfall when she goes to market.

It makes me wonder what is going through this farmer's mind

when he or she sees such a productive result to his or her effort.

Certainly some words or themes come to mind:

pride, gratitude, a sense of accomplishment, security, maybe even relief.

After all, farming is a very up and down occupation.

Some years you work hard, have a good crop, and sell it when the price is good  
and you can rest easy

knowing that you and your family are secure for the next little while.

But then you can have other years

where the weather doesn't cooperate, your yield is small,

and you find the market flooded with product

and the price drops and you don't even recupe

what you spent to produce the meager yield you did have.

So when times are good and you experience success, is it wrong to be proud of your efforts?

Should you not be able to enjoy the fruits of your labors and rest easy for a season or two?

On the surface, our parable this week seems to suggest just that.

We have a farmer who has been very successful,  
so much so that his barn won't hold all the crops  
that he's been fortunate enough to produce.  
He's almost giddy at finding himself in such an advantageous predicament  
that he begins to plan how he can remedy that situation,  
as well as looking forward to all the benefits his success will afford him,  
only to discover it all comes to naught  
as his life will be forfeited that very night.

What are we to make of this? Is success a bad thing?

Are we not to enjoy the fruits of our labor?

Walking in the Christian faith always presents a problem of dualism.

We live in a real world with real needs that are met with real resources.

Most of us need to work a real job to earn real money  
to pay for real shelter, real food, real clothes,  
and all the associated bills that go with that real life.

Yet as followers of the risen Christ,

we have the expectation of something more  
and are expected to be something more.

This worldly life is just the transition period to an eternity of promise to come,  
we are to live in this world  
as if that world is already present around and through us.

As people of faith, we are not to put our trust in those worldly items  
that we rely on to supply our needs: our jobs, our money, our stuff.

Yet it is all those things that enable us to live and live abundantly,  
or so we tend to think.

Quite the conundrum, isn't it?

But is all the "stuff" really the problem that Jesus is addressing in this parable?

Or is it the main character's perspective that is the problem?

From the text, his only thoughts seem to be on his "stuff,"

on what he feels he has worked hard for and earned for himself.

He is obsessed with ensuring that "stuff" is protected and secure,

and he daydreams about all the other "stuff" he can buy with those gains.

There is no thought about why he had the favorable conditions

that enabled him to be so successful;

no thought about his neighbors who may not have been more fortunate.

So much of his time has been devoted to working hard to bring all this about

that he now defines himself by his wealth

and the many benefits that wealth will bring to him.

It's not hard to do.

When working is such a focus of what we do,

it can be all too easy for that work to define who we are.

How do we identify ourselves when we meet other people?

After the initial exchange of names, what is usually the next question?

What do you do?

We assign part of our identity to the jobs we do,

and often then relate our value to that identity.

We try for the better, more prestigious position,

strive to make more, have more.

We worry that we won't have enough.

We try to live as Jesus taught, but we continue to build bigger barns.

We continue to worry about not having enough for ourselves.

We continue to make our own plans for the future  
while often our siblings on the streets go in need.

We too, like the man in our parable, can lose sight of where it all comes from,  
who ultimately provides for our success.

Too often we forget that all this “stuff,” while certainly enabled by our efforts,  
ultimately is provided to us by the blessings of God.

Our Creator, makes those seemingly random circumstances  
come together for us to get that good job,  
to have that good season on the farm,  
or to get that nice house at a price we can afford.

All that “stuff” that we are blessed with is provided in part for our benefit,  
but it isn't really ours to claim.

We are called to be stewards of the resources we are blessed with.

In our parable, the farmer was only focused on himself,  
and how he could keep and enjoy the blessings he stewarded all to himself.

There is no mention of using that wealth to the benefit of others,  
or of giving thanks and seeking discernment  
about how he was meant to use the blessings he was given.

Like all of us at times, he got sidetracked into defining his life by his role in this world,  
and lost sight of the kin-dom that draws near,  
and the Creator who ultimately provides for all our needs,  
if we let God direct our efforts.

Max Lucado, in his book *More Stories for the Heart*, relates the following illustration.

"A little boy is on the beach.

On his knees he scoops and packs the sand with plastic shovels  
into a bright red bucket.

Then he upends the bucket on the surface and lifts it.

And, to the delight of the little architect, a castle tower is created.

All afternoon he will work. Spooning out the moat. Packing the walls.

Bottle tops will be sentries. Popsicle sticks will be bridges.

A sandcastle will be built.

Then switching to a different scene.

“Big city. Busy streets. Rumbling traffic.

A man in his office.

At his desk he shuffles papers into stacks and delegates assignments.

He cradles the phone on his shoulder

and punches the keyboard with his fingers.

Numbers are juggled and contracts are signed

and much to the delight of the man, a profit is made.

All his life he will work. Formulating the plans. Forecasting the future.

Annuities will be sentries. Capital gains will be bridges.

An empire will be built.

Two builders of two castles. They have much in common.

They shape granules into grandeurs. They see nothing and make something.

They are diligent and determined. And for both the tide will rise

and the end will come.

Yet that is where the similarities cease.

For the boy sees the end while the man ignores it.

Watch the boy as the dusk approaches.

As the waves near, the wise child jumps to his feet  
and begins to clap. There is no sorrow. No fear. No regret.

He knew this would happen. He is not surprised.

And when the great breaker crashes into his castle  
and his masterpiece is sucked into the sea, he smiles.

He smiles, picks up his tools, takes his father's hand, and goes home. "

The grownup, however, is not so wise.

As the wave of years collapses on his castle he is terrified.

He hovers over the sandy monument to protect it.

He blocks the waves from the walls he has made.

Salt-water soaked and shivering he snarls at the incoming tide.

'It's my castle,' he defies.

The ocean need not respond.

Both know to whom the sand belongs...

Children can teach us a lot about sand castles. Watch them and learn.

Go ahead and build, but build with a child's heart.

When the sun sets and the tides take -- applaud.

Salute the process of life, take your Father's hand and go home"

It's a problem of dualism.

Is our focus on the kin-dom of God in the here and now,

or is it on the "stuff" of this world, and our role in getting that "stuff."

Our illustration points out not only the way in which God provides for us,

but also in the fleeting aspect of this worldly life we put such value in.

Both our texts in Luke and Colossians highlight this need for the proper perspective.

Yes, we live in a real world and we work to build our castles in the sand there.

But it's important for us to realize that it's not our sand,  
and while we benefit from that work,  
the work is not what's important.

It's the people and the mission,

the community within and without the faith that matters.

It's lifting up God's values and priorities

and joining in the work God is doing in this world while we are here,  
using the resources we've been blessed with.

Paul lists a variety of vices to avoid in his letter to the Colossians

to help us gain the proper focus.

One list highlights some of those aspects of a worldly life

that can take our focus from God and the kin-dom that draws near,  
those facets that can lead us to make it all about ourselves  
and our own selfish wants  
such as unhealthy desires and greed.

The second list focuses on attitudes

that pull us apart from our neighbors and community:  
anger, wrath, malice, and slander.

We always face this dualist struggle,

making a living and surviving in the earthly world

while struggling to keep a Jesus perspective.

I'd like to close this morning with a little story about a man named Henry Kaiser  
who owned a construction business.

While building a levee along a river bank,

a violent rainstorm flooded the earth-moving machinery

and destroyed the work that had been done.

As Kaiser approached the work site to assess the damages,

he found his crew bemoaning the mud and the buried earthmoving equipment.

As his workers surrounded him, Kaiser asked, 'Why are you so glum?'

'Can't you see the disaster?' they asked. 'Our equipment is covered with mud.'

Smiling, Kaiser asked, 'What mud?'

'You must be kidding. Look around you. We are surrounded by a sea of mud.

How can you say you don't see any?'

'Well,' said Henry Kaiser, 'what I see is clear blue sky filled with bright sunshine.

I've never known mud to sustain itself against the powerful sun.

Soon it will be dried up

and then we will be able to move our equipment and start over.

Furthermore, our attitude will not only affect how we see reality

but will also affect the reality itself. Sun or mud, the choice is yours.'

The difference between sun or mud is a matter of perspective.

Again, what we expect to see we see.

This story involving Henry J. Kaiser

reinforces our choice to look at any situation from more than one point of view."

What will you see the sun or the mud?

As we go into our week and continue our reflective Lenten journey with Jesus,

let us think how we can keep more of our focus on the values of God's kin-dom

while we live our lives in this world.

How can we witness to a different reality to those around us,

a reality in stark contrast to what's valued in our culture?

A reality not based on greed, selfishness and exclusion

but one based on kin-dom values of charity, love and inclusion and welcome.

May we find our way to be witnesses to a better perspective. Amen.