

Sermon: 8th Sunday after Pentecost (c) August 3, 2025

Peace, Danville Pr. Lucy Kolin, preacher

Texts: Eccl. 1:2, 13-14; 2:18-23, Lk 12:13-21

Today's readings call us to remember what it means to be a child of God and a full inheritor of God's kingdom...or as my sister pastor Lori Eichmann likes to say, God's "kindom," since with God's it's all about relationship, not ownership. These scriptures remind us what that inheritance **is**, how it comes to us, and how receiving it is less about **possession** than about **service**, less about **ownership** than about **sharing**.

The gospel reading begins with a question posed to Jesus by someone who wanted Jesus' assistance to get **their** share of the family inheritance. Jesus, however, refused to act as arbiter or judge. But he **did** go on to talk about **inheritance**...though in a **different** way. And he did it – no surprise! – by telling a parable.

For most of the story, there appears to be only **one** character: a farmer who's had a very good harvest, a crop that has yielded much more than his barns can hold. We get to listen in as the farmer debates what to do with this plentiful harvest. But if you listen carefully, you'll notice all his thoughts and reflections are full only of **himself**, of "me, myself, and I." No other human being and **not even God** figured in those thoughts or was invited into the conversation. Every line the farmer spoke was spoken to **himself**, and everything he said referred only to **himself**: **my** soul, **my** goods, **my** barns. It's only at the **end** of the parable that somebody **else** enters the story: and that someone is **God**...who inserts God's self into the story because the farmer hasn't made room for God.

Those of us who spend any time around young children know that littles ones see the world primarily through the lens of “me, myself, and I.” It’s only through patient teaching and our own example, that they begin to realize the world includes **other** people...and **God**. And they **matter**. But it’s not just children. We **adults also** still have difficulty thinking outside of our own selves – **our** needs, **our** plans, **our** wants. So, God’s Spirit must constantly teach **us**...just as Jesus did that day with this parable.

Getting back to the parable, Jesus is **not** saying it’s wrong to plan or to save or to manage the resources we’ve been given – whether money, crops, our homes, or our talents. **Rather** what Jesus is doing in today’s story and elsewhere is opening our eyes and our hearts to the **big** picture, to the One who is at the heart of it all, the One who made us and all things and gives us daily bread, the One who has secured our future through Jesus Christ, whose pleasure **already** has been to give us the kingdom, that great inheritance of abundant love, forgiveness, and life, **and** a future forever with God, **and** a family of neighbors to love and to serve.

In all the plans the farmer was considering, he saw the bountiful harvest not as gift and possibility but as a means to his own ends. He **never** saw such bounty as an occasion to bless God or help his neighbors. So, I think he would have been horrified by that line on the front of our bulletin from the Japanese poet Masahide – “My barn having burned, I can now see the moon.”

In fact, the **blessing** of the farmer’s harvest seemed to become almost a **dilemma** for him, a problem of storage that robbed him of the joy it should have brought. And then, of course, comes the big ending

where God interrupts to remind him that death is coming and, when it does, the harvest will fall into somebody **else's** hands. The reality of our mortality and the reality that all things belong to God – indeed, that **we** belong to God – and are meant to be used for **God's** purposes – which means for our **neighbor's** good – was lost on the man in the parable...but that reality is **not** lost on **us**.

Jesus ends the parable by saying, “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.” Or, as Eugene Peterson translated it, “That’s what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God.” So what does it look like when we are **rich toward God**? Simply put, it means living rich toward our **neighbor**, living always with an eye toward how we can use **whatever** we’ve been given – wisdom, money, homes, skills, food, and hearts of compassion and love – to benefit our neighbors near and far. A Tanzanian friend of mine once described the home of an American acquaintance as “a house full of things that do nothing,” by which she meant **not** that the person had a house full of broken appliances, but rather that everything in the house was dedicated only to the person who owned the house. My friend, while staying there, never really felt comfortable using anything, because it was very clear it didn’t belong to her.

That is **not** what we learn from Jesus. When he stopped that day to talk about inheritance and discipleship, he was headed somewhere else, namely to Jerusalem, where, as he’d **already** told the disciples, he would be put to death. Yet, **even and especially** with that knowledge, Jesus was intent on talking with already-disciples and would-be disciples about the question of inheritance, not the inheritance of the brother in the crowd, or even the inheritance of the farmer in the parable who apparently dies with **no** heirs or beneficiaries. **Instead**,

Jesus wanted to talk with **those** disciples and with **us** about the inheritance that is meant for **all God's children**. Indeed, a few verses later, Jesus says, "Don't be afraid, little flock; it is God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." You and I are children of God, full inheritors of all that we need, an inheritance **no one** can take away from us. No need to earn it, no need to hoard it, as some of the Hebrews tried to do in the desert when God send them manna. It's yours and mine, signed, sealed, delivered...given freely, not grudgingly, by the grace of God. So then, whatever **else** we may receive in life, we can **afford** to be generous, to acknowledge God as the Giver of all good gifts and to put those things to work for God by using them to care for others, **especially** those in need. Would that such thinking would **always** be part of budget discussions not just of churches but also of governments! Would that talk of security would always include talk of generosity that breaks down walls and reduces fear! If that were so, would we be grieving over the thousands of children and adults starving to death in Gaza with food so near or the many around the world who will go hungry this week because food that was meant to be distributed through US AID is being destroyed instead of distributed?

This way of living is the new life with which we are clothed at baptism. Every Ash Wednesday we hear, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." That's a truth we often try to **avoid** looking at by stacking up all sorts of things in front of it...our **own** version of "bigger barns." But God loves dust and sanctifies it, so we can trust that **our** dust, like Jesus' own, is now holy and will not end in death but rise again. That is why the writer of Colossians pleads with us not to put the old clothes back on, but rather to let the Spirit help our lives grow to **fill out** the **new clothes**, the **new stature** of the person

God creates, redeems, and sanctifies us to be. In this way, we will be delivered from turning blessings into dilemmas and can live more and more open to God, who promises to multiply all that we are and all that we have into blessings far beyond our imagining.

I've just finished reading *Change the Recipe: Because You Can't Build a Better World Without Breaking Some Eggs*, a little book by Jose Andres, the founder of World Central Kitchen. In it he describes how and why he, a successful chef and restaurant owner, came to found the Kitchen that shows up in places that are experiencing natural or human-made disasters that leave people hungry, in war zones like Gaza and Ukraine or in places that have experienced a natural disaster, like Puerto Rico or New Orleans after hurricanes. He says two quotes, one from John Steinbeck and one from Martin Luther King, Jr. are at the heart of the Kitchen. The Steinbeck quote is from *The Grapes of Wrath*: "Wherever there's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there." And the Dr. King quote is from *Beyond Vietnam*: "We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late." Those words have moved Jose Andres to work toward building longer tables, not higher walls.

Going back to today's gospel parable, we read that, as the farmer contemplated the amazing harvest, he told himself: "Eat, drink, and be merry!"...his only concern wasn't longer tables for sharing but rather building more storage for his plenty; the eating, drinking, and being merry wasn't something he planned to share.

But, by the grace of God, you and I see something **different**. We see that all this – our whole life and **even our death** – is sanctified and

kept safe by the One who says, “This is my body, my blood, my life, my death...for **you**.” Safe and secure in **that** knowledge, in **that** belonging, dressed in new life, God gives us eyes to see beyond ourselves, to see how all that we are and all that we have can become just what God needs to answer our **neighbors’** prayer for daily bread. **This** is the life we were created for, a life that joyfully embraces unlocking possibilities for our neighbors in this community, in this country, and around the world, by throwing wide the doors of **our** barns – personal, church, and national – so that we and **all** our neighbors near and far will be able to share the bounty of nutrition and health, to recognize our common humanity and our common needs, and say, “Thanks be to God!” This, my friends, is what we were created for. So today and tomorrow, as we look to the unfolding future of Peace Lutheran Church, let us dream boldly of **new** ways of sharing all that we are and all that we have...just like our Lord Jesus. God grant this today for Jesus’ sake. Amen.