

“Satisfies”

New London UMC

Sunday, July 31, 2022

Psalm 107:1-9, 33-43 *The Message*; Luke 12:13-21 *NRSV*

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I don't know about you, but today's reading from the Gospel of Luke makes me uneasy for different reasons. The first reason that comes to mind is pretty obvious. My father decided he needed to build a new corn crib one year because the crop to be harvested looked like it was going to be way more than he had room to hold in the barn as shelled corn. Long story short, as the new crib was nearing completion, he was on a ladder working to get something in place along the edge of the top of the crib when something happened and the ladder shifted out from under him. He tried to hang onto the crib but ended up falling and breaking his leg on the edge of the concrete pad under the crib. He was taken to the hospital and while he was there they ran some other tests and learned that his leg wasn't all he had to worry about. Needless to say, it was bittersweet to see that big harvest of corn when it filled the new crib.

Another reason for my uneasiness with this parable recently came in the mail in the form of second quarter statements for a couple of retirement accounts. When I saw how quickly all the years of “earnings” had turned into “losses” – I had to question, “Does it matter?” Are these retirement accounts my equivalent of planning to build bigger barns that I may never see? Or do they represent good stewardship and preparedness for the future? I just don't know.

But I do know that this parable also makes me uneasy because it reminds me of the utter despair I felt when it seemed like we would *never* be done dealing with the “stuff” that remained after loved ones had died. I know this despair was directly linked to handling things that triggered memories – to the degree that it seemed like I was throwing people away with each thing that I pitched out. . . . Overall it would be safe to say that this parable really is *not* one of my favorites.

So I was startled to read in an Upper Room *Disciplines* devotion written by Daniel Wolpert that this *is* one of his *favorite* Gospel stories because “In one stroke, Luke challenges both the multi-billion dollar retirement industry and the personal storage shed industry!” (p. 255, *The Upper Room Disciplines 2022*) Reading that made me wonder how old Daniel Wolpert might be, and if he has ever had to clear out someone's personal effects after their death. But it also challenged me to take another look at the parable. To try to see what it looks like from a different angle.

You might be aware that a big, well actually a HUGH, self-help mantra is: “You are enough.” This mantra has struck a chord with so many people because we tend to be our own worse critic and judge. The mantra reminds us that instead of constantly comparing one's self negatively to others, or feeling insecure because you don't own this or that, or you don't have a degree, or you don't live in that neighborhood, or you think you don't

make enough money, that one should instead think, “You are enough right now as you are.” That it is enough to simply be who you are.

Clearly the landowner in Jesus’ parable has not only gotten that message, but maybe he has taken it too far. Not only is he enough, he seems to be all he thinks about. We’re privy to his own internal monologue about his abundant harvest of crops: “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.” . . . His self-talk is all “I, I, I, I, I, I do, I have, I will”! Did you hear him thanking God for this abundant harvest? No? Did you hear him planning how he could help other people with this bumper crop? No? Will the new and bigger barns holding his ample goods only ensure that he can sell his excess at a good price at a time when others are in need? Is he looking ahead to an even more profitable future for himself?

There is another popular mantra that says, “God is enough.” How could the landowner’s self-talk have changed if he had believed that God was enough? How much of the harvest did he need to satisfy his own hunger? How many barns would he have needed to provide food for his own household, his animals, and to have seeds to plant the next year? How could he have used this harvest to have been rich toward God?

In contrast we read in Psalm 107 how God has been rich toward us. We read how God’s steadfast love never runs out. How God hears us when we cry out and leads us through our desperate days. How God satisfies our hunger and thirst, and frees us to find peace. And at the end of the psalm it says: “Good people see this and are glad; bad people are speechless, stopped in their tracks. If you are really wise, you’ll think this over – it’s time you appreciated God’s deep love.” . . . If we are really wise we’ll understand how God is more than enough for us. How God has gifted us with life – and shares our lives with us. How God’s on-going presence with us, and God’s generous care and unending love sustain us. Are we wise enough to realize that? Are we wise enough to be grateful that God is enough now and forever?

Because if we’re not wise, what is the alternative? It may be to find ourselves standing in for the landowner in Jesus’ parable and hearing God say to us, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” I don’t know about you, but the prospect of hearing God say that to me makes me very uneasy. So instead of focusing on building bigger barns it might be wise to focus on giving greater praise and thanksgiving to God for the bumper crops that I have been privileged to harvest, and to ask God how that bounty might best be used to God’s glory. Because I know that God has already satisfied my needs through everything God has already provided for me, and will continue to provide for me. If I’m wise I will remember and give thanks that God’s deep and steadfast love is enough. Amen.