

“Letting Go” – Rev. Jennifer Adams

August 1, 2010 – Proper 13C

Before we jump too quickly into the obvious sermon about greed and possessions (and don't worry we'll get there eventually,) but before we go there I want to go back us up a little bit to the verses in the gospel of Luke that are just before the verses that we heard this morning, because as is often the case there's more going on here than a simple phrase or two. The context was this: The crowd had “gathered by the thousands,” Luke said, and the atmosphere was incredibly intense. So this wasn't just a cozy conversation among Jesus and the disciples where someone asked a relatively innocent question. Things had actually heated up quite a bit publically – the numbers of followers was significant; the synagogue leaders, the rulers and authorities were watching Jesus' every move and his followers were getting nervous. And so in this chapter in Luke, Jesus was telling the crowds to not be afraid. He was honest about the challenges. “Things are going to get incredibly ugly” he told them, and he talked about the cross too but as the crowds wondered aloud about how to respond to the questions coming their way, the potential persecution coming their way, Jesus told them essentially that those threats could ultimately do no harm. “Those who persecute you can do damage to the body,” he said, “but the soul is in God's hands and remember that in the grand scheme, all shall be well.” Just a few verses before what we heard today, Jesus told the crowd about how God cares for even the sparrows so of course God would take care of them too. And so at the point we picked it up today you'd expect the next line to be something like a collective sigh of relief or some sort of renewed, confident resolve cried out from the thousands.

Instead at that moment a guy raised his hand and asked Jesus to go talk to his brother about dividing the family inheritance. And given the context, you can understand Jesus' frustration. Jesus had just poured out his heart and soul, talked to these thousands about revolutionary change, and the cross, and letting go of fear and trusting in God. He had just shouted out this beautiful reminder about the sparrows of the world and this guy wanted Him to now take a few minutes to settle his family's inheritance issues. It's kind of funny really. Teachers can probably relate to this kind of moment. Parents too. It's just like those moments when you've shared some hugely important life lesson and the student wants to know if that question will be on tomorrow's test or your child wants to know if (besides all that good wisdom about life) their sibling's imperfections have also been appropriately addressed. It was a moment when this big and challenging yet forever beautiful thing had been put forward, and this person didn't see it because he was too focused on something he had gotten too focused on.

And so the message of this gospel is the challenge to let go of whatever preoccupations get in the way of our being present, truly present to the gospel. To let go of those things that pull our attentions away from real life, our real needs and the needs of our neighbors. For the guy who raised his hand and therefore the guy in the parable, the problematic preoccupation was wealth. In the parable the man had more than he needed. He had “produced abundantly,” Jesus said. He had torn down his old barns and built new and bigger barns to store all that he had “his crops and all his goods,” the story said. And then after all of that work, he had a conversation with himself.

“I said to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’” But then, God interrupted the conversation because God wanted this guy’s focus to be somewhere else. God didn’t want this man, or the guy in the crowd to remain preoccupied with his own personal accumulations, on what he had earned and secured for himself, and how he was going to keep all his stuff safe and how all that stuff was going to keep him happy, truly genuinely at peace for the rest of his life. Instead, in this parable and in this entire passage, Jesus was asking, imploring people to allow their souls to find peace in the abundant grace and love of God. Period. And he was saying, and this man in the crowd had proven that often wealth and stuff and other things get in the way of our resting in the peace that is of God.

And so the challenge today is to name for ourselves what it is that gets too much of our attention, to name what it is that stirs our anxieties and makes us worry more than is good for our souls. The warning is not to make bigger barns in order to store them as they multiply, but to do the work instead of creating space for that which we truly need. The good news is that even the sparrows have been tended to and that much more each and every one of us is. The good news is that even in times of persecution we are blessed, so pay attentions to the blessings in the day to day. God’s abundance gives us more than we could ask for or even imagine if only we make room in our hearts, in our souls, in our minds, in our homes for that kind of abundance to thrive.

Amen.