**Greed or a Generous Heart**

*This sermon is revised from one delivered during worship following some feedback that it carried some judgement and absolutes in it.*

*Hopefully this is a better version. RMW*

This morning we encounter another challenging parable from Jesus about money and wealth as well as a message about selling our possessions and giving to the poor. The farmer in the parable, who has a bounty of harvest, spends his time planning on how to keep it all for himself, building bigger storage barns for when he will need it. The time and resources toward this is wasted as he dies before he can enjoy it. While the parable is a challenge to wealth and riches, it is more about greed, selfishness, and self-centredness.

This summer while staying with Brian’s mom we watched a fair bit of TV together and one of the shows was Let’s Make a Deal, you know the one with people being given choices between winning something or taking a chance to win something more, but it also could be nothing. At the end of the show they go to the biggest winners to see who wants to go for the “Big Deal”. I was struck by the number of times someone who had won a fairly significant amount, like a car, would give it up to go for the Big Deal, they wanted to take the chance for more! It is symptomatic of our culture – too often we want more. Greed and materialism is rampant in our society.

The parable is indicative of this as well. Jesus is with a large crowd teaching, when one person asks him to divide the family inheritance with his brother. The person is looking for more than his share and Jesus responds that he has not come to mediate between people, and then tells the parable. The farmer in the story has a windfall and when he needs to discern what to do with it all, who does he talk to? Himself. He says: ““What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?” Then he said, “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.” There is no consultation with others, there is no consideration or prayer with God. There is no consideration of sharing his resources with others in need. It is all about him. He feels no need to rely on God or anyone or anything else. This is his downfall. It is ours as well.

I have been reading the book Practices for Refounding God’s People. By Allan Roxburgh and Martin Robinson. It outlines and gives history to what they call modernity’s wager, that the modern era has ushered in self-reliance, and the belief that we no longer need to look to God or God’s agency in our lives. It was, it is, a belief that life could be lived well without God. Combined with that is the reliance on the nation state, and capitalism, this wager has formed our culture over the last number of centuries. It is part of the reason churches are struggling and it is now unravelling, which provides us as church, with an opportunity to reclaim and refound ourselves as God’s people. They write:

Refounding is an invitation to see the unraveling from a different perspective. It calls us to pay attention to the Spirit’s movements from the edges, from the side effects of life in the local rather than from the principles laid out in the sixteenth century or our current operating manuals. Such paying attention is a huge quest. In (Ulrich) Beck’s language ‘We are all prisoners of a language world that conserves the old certainties … and makes us blind to the new diversity of options.’ Christian life in the West is being refounded by the Spirit, but it is happening off to the side, coming in through the back door. The unraveling creates a fermenting and bubbling involving a thousand small effects among ordinary people trying to step outside the failed promises of the modern because they sense that another future is being formed.

We are being challenged to see God outside of where we might usually look. We are to embrace that God is active in the world and in our lives and look to God when making decisions, living our lives, and share the vision for the world that God has. We need more than ourselves, most of us are aware of that. This is what the farmer is missing. It is relationships. Relationship with God and with others. In our relationship with others, in the love and support we experience, we find God. We know this when we draw on and experience the support of our community, our loved ones, our friends, our church. They are there when we are in crisis, when we need them. We also have to reach out to them and draw on the support that is there.

When we rely on ourselves, are directed by greed and materialism, we can lose sight of those relationships and what is important. A good example of this in my opinion, occurred this week with the reactions to the ruling by the Court of Appeal regarding the Trans Mountain Pipeline that the federal government failed in its constitutional duty to "engage in a considered, meaningful two-way dialogue" with First Nations affected by the project. Despite this, the reaction by governments seems to be openness to addressing the concerns whilestill be committed to moving forward with the project. without addressing the concerns named. It seems there has been some blindspots to our dependence on oil and the governements and oil industry can’t see that moving forward on this project is not good for the earth. I wonder whether creating more markets for oil is the way to go. There is a movement to disinvest and end our dependence on fossil fuels. It may be ideal but Is this feasible? While I believe that it is a good goal, I also know I don’t do very well at changing or limiting my dependence on oil. What are the things that need to change in my life? I could ride my bike more. Even in the summer, I usually commit to riding regularly but have not done very well. It is too easy to be lazy and drive or make an excuse because I have an appointment further away. We are probably all guilty of this but it doesn’t help the climate. What will help to change our habits?

I think one thing would be making it easier to use alternatives such as riding a bike. Better bike lanes, and better public transit would help. This takes resources. So rather than investing $4.5 billion in a pipeline project, wouldn’t that money be better spent on developing and supporting the alternatives to oil that would be of so much more benefit to the earth and all Canadians. Our moral backruptcy around this issue is evident in the Alberta governments’ statement that they are going to pull out of the federal climate change plan because the pipeline project has been delayed. To me, it never made sense. How can we support pipelines for oil transport and a strategy for addressing climate change at the same time? Part of the strategy for climate change needs to be reducing our dependence on oil, and creating new energy industries and economies. Wouldn’t it be better for the proceeds from any carbon tax go toward supporting and creating alternatives and infrastructures that would support a more green economy? Our oil industry and governments do not seem to be allowing this kind of innovation and research toward alternative energies to proceed. This is an example of corporate greed and the foolishness Jesus was talking about. We keep building pipelines (barns) for all the oil we have, but will we really be able to use it and if we do what are the consequences? Our dependence and commitment to oil could be contributing to our demise. One of my fears is that it will take a major climate disaster or economic crisis to change our ways and work toward real change.

Both in this section and in the end of the following section of our reading for today, there is a reference to how we store treasures: “ ‘So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.’” Jesus says after the parable, when the farmer is not able to enjoy all he had stored up and did not share. The next section is all about not worrying and trusting that we will be taken care of like the birds and the lilies of the field. This section ends with directions to sell our possessions, and give to the poor, ‘for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’. This basically means that if we have a passion for something, put our heart into it, our treasures should be there too. Where we really put our money, shows where our heart actually is. If we say we are passionate about something and don’t support it financially, there is a question of how much we really support it. We hear rhetoric about support to address climate change, but the financial commitment and support is not there. Presently here at Eastside, we will be moving into a Joint Needs Assessment Committee. This will be an opportunity for us to explore our mission and ministry and what directions we want to take in the future and what resources we have for it. It is joint because there are two reps from Presbytery, the regional body of the church, who will work with us. The reason for this needs assessment, is that we are having trouble meeting our financial commitments. It is very hard to grow our ministry programs when there is a very limited budget to work with. It is challenging to try and continue to do what we want to do with less and less. When we talk about cutting expenses, too often only major area that will make a difference, we are told, is staffing. The JNAC provides an opportunity to explore how we might increase our givings, cut our expenses or explore new possibilities or opportunities for meeting our needs. It is an opportunity to be creative and open to what might work for us in our context. If you love this church community, does it show by what you give to it? Do our treasures we have here, show that our heart is in this place? We have a vibrant, wonderful community with lots to celebrate. May we build on that so it can be reflected in our stewardship.

We can be fearful about our future or embrace God’s love and trust in God. Fear separates us from God and is the enemy of generous stewardship, Karl Jacobson wrote in his commentary on this passage. There is a passage in todays’ reading about worry, calling us not to worry. Worry and fear are connected. We often worry because we are afraid, and our worry feeds our fear. Many of us know that worry is not productive or helpful. It does not accomplish anything for us. It takes us away from being in this moment. When we find ourselves worrying, it is important to examine the fear connected with that worry. Is the fear based in any reality? Usually it is not. If there is reality to it, we can look at the likelihood of that reality coming to fruition. Do we gain anything by focusing on it? We can come up with strategies for addressing that likelihood, and then put live with it in a new way. This is different than worry, which can consume us and take us away from any productive thinking and the present reality, which we need to embrace, experience and enjoy as much as we can. God is with us, and we are not alone. We have a community of support around us that we can draw on for strength and love. God is in this. This kind of awareness and presence, enables us trust and to live with any fears we may face.

God calls us to generous love and support, in relationship with one another and the earth, that we may pour our treasures into that which we are passionate about, where our heart is. May it be so.