

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C
The Reverend D. S. Mote, PhD
St Paul's Episcopal Church, Key West, FL
July 31, 2022
Hosea 11:1-11
Psalm 107:1-9, 43
Colossians 3:1-11
Luke 12:13-21

We Forget So Easily

Today, this eighth Sunday after the day of Pentecost, we continue our journey with Jesus in Luke's gospel. We will be traveling with Jesus as Luke presents his journeys of teaching and healing throughout this season after Pentecost, all the way until the beginning of Advent. So, if you're counting, that's sixteen more weeks with Luke after today.

We find in this journey across these weeks in the gospel of Luke some hard sayings and difficult and sometimes perplexing teachings of Jesus. As always, we do well to understand at least a little about the context in which the teaching is taking place.

Today for instance, we have a gospel set in the midst of a period when great crowds of people are following Jesus from place to place. Some of them are serious disciples; some have other motivations.

Today's gospel reminds us that whatever else Jesus is, he is a rabbi, a teacher in and of the Jewish law and traditions. People were accustomed to seeking a rabbi's opinion about circumstances where the Torah, the religious law, might be open to multiple interpretations. If you got the advice or opinion of a rabbi, especially if it was an opinion that agreed with your own, you could take it and add it to your argument as you tried to sort out a situation with someone else. I don't know, say, the inheritance to be divided between you and your sibling, for example.

So, a man desiring an opinion from Jesus the rabbi calls out from the crowd, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Inheritance. Hmm. As some of us have experienced up close and personal, "Where there's a will, there's a fray."

Jesus could have inquired about the details of this particular inheritance case. He could have asked the man some questions to get a clearer picture. For example, *Are you the younger brother or the elder brother? What's the holdup in settling the estate?* Things like that.

But he doesn't. In the midst of this scene where he is being appealed to as a rabbi for a legal opinion, the only question Jesus asks is, basically, *Dude, who made me the arbitrator of this case?*

And then, he immediately Jesus turns from this one person's request to address everyone in the crowd, all of them: *Be careful, y'all. Watch out for greed of all kinds.* And then this amazing line, "One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Mic drop. He could've stopped right there.

But immediately, he pivots to a parable. We know this story as the parable of the rich fool. Why is the person in it, a wealthy farmer, a fool? Is he foolish because he is wealthy? No. Is he foolish because he is successful? No. Is he foolish because he has a plan for the future? No.

He is foolish because he has missed the point of this life and the reality of this life which Jesus has so succinctly summarized. *Our life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.* He is foolish because his only concern is holding on tight to what he has and figuring out how to create space to hold on to more. He is foolish because he thinks and acts only for himself.

Look how many "I's" and "my's" are in this remarkably short story: *'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,*

Not once does he speak of anyone else, not his spouse or children or workers or friend or neighbors or even enemies. And not once does he mention God.

Notice, Luke says, the *land* of this person produced abundantly. He didn't produce abundance himself. Without the cooperation of weather and workers and the blessing of God, his harvests would not have been so plentiful, or even have been at all.

One critique of his plan to pull down the barns he has in order to build bigger barns is that he is attempting to save produce which is perishable. How long can he expect to keep it, really, with smaller barns or bigger barns? Is he not going to distribute any of it to anyone else?

But before we get on him too hard, perhaps we should ask ourselves if we do the same thing. Do we keep items that we never use, have never used? Do we hold onto things that are long past their usefulness for us, rather than pass them along to others who might put them to good use? Do we add more things to those unused items, such that we need larger places to live or to rent storage units in which to keep them indefinitely?

Perhaps we should ask ourselves, *Why do we hold on to so much stuff?* And why do we tend to keep getting more of it, even when we don't particularly want or need it. Especially why do we do so when Jesus, our model in all things, has put it so clearly, *Our life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.*

What *does* our life consist in then? Relationships. Community. Generosity. Care. Struggle. Joy. Loving God and loving neighbor. Or, even more boldly, in the words of the reading from Colossians, *Christ is our life*.

But isn't it the case that we are prone to prioritize things over people or, worse yet, to treat people as though they are things?

It's pretty demoralizing to realize how often we operate without considering God or neighbor. We easily forget God. We easily leave others out of our equations. We forget so easily. What can we do?

Jesus the Christ, fully human and fully divine, must have known, must know, all too well the human tendency to forget. The pioneer and perfecter of our faith left us a means to deal with our forgetfulness.

He instituted a memorial, a means of remembrance, a way to un-forget so that we who number ourselves among his friends and disciples may continue in his risen life with renewed confidence and hope; not living for ourselves alone like the wealthy and foolish farmer of the parable but rather living for the One who lived and died and rose for us.

Every Eucharistic prayer in our tradition has four parts. The order of the parts may vary, but all four parts are present in each one. One of the parts is called the *anamnesis*, the part of the prayer in which we remember Christ's saving work in the world—and in us. The *anamnesis*, which means, literally, the unforgetting.

In the amazing gift of holy communion, the memorial we participate in, the sacrament in which we encounter the real presence of Christ, we are called to remember. We are called to un-forget. And we do. We remember that Christ is our life. We remember, as the reading from Hosea says, that God has led us *with cords of human kindness over and over, with bands of love*. We “present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God” as we come to the altar. It's glorious: we un-forget, we remember.

And most likely, before we come back to the table the next time, we will have forgotten again. And it is all right. As the old hymn says, “Jesus knows our every weakness.” God knows that we are like this, that we mean so well and hope so hard and dream so big and have such good intentions and so often fall so flat.

We will keep forgetting, and it is all right. It is all right if we forget so long as we also remember again. “*Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.*” “*Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new*

Covenant....Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me.”

As prone to forgetfulness as we are, we have this sacred, marvelous, simple, mysterious, powerful meal, which we are both commanded and invited to share. By it we remember. Through it we un-forget. And dear ones, that is very good news. AMEN.