

# ***Do I Have Enough?***

Sermon by Pastor Dave Olson on Luke 12:13-34

Sunday, September 2, 2018

“Do I have enough?” This question about finances and basic needs keeps on popping into our thoughts in various ways throughout our lifetime. Depending on one’s social class, one might fixate on one of these levels of insecurity. A third grader wonders on Friday afternoon, “Will we have food at home tomorrow?” A parent is paying monthly bills and realizes “We have too much month left at the end of the money!” A couple is considering retirement and they ask their financial adviser, “Will we run out of money when we’re old?” All of these situations are a variation on the question, “Where is the source of true security?”

Our Gospel reading for today addresses this question. In the verses just prior to our reading, Jesus had been instructing his disciples to have courage when their lives would be threatened. Then someone from the crowd made an “off topic” request. This man wanted Jesus to be the judge or referee in an inheritance dispute with his brother.

Now if any of you have ever served as an executor of an estate, you know all too well this position can be fraught with challenges. Siblings can fight over anything from “Who gets Mom’s china?” to how the money from the sale of the house will be divided. Settling an estate can often divide families. The basic concern in all these fights is “I didn’t get enough!”

So how did Jesus respond to this request? He refused to take sides in the dispute. Instead, he chose to remain in his role of teacher. He began teaching with a proverb: “Beware of all covetousness; for a person’s life does not consist in the abundance of one’s possessions.”

Next Jesus continued his teaching with a parable or story as he frequently liked to do. In this story, the rich farmer had deluded himself into a false sense of security. The flaw in his thinking was not that he had become wealthy, but that he couldn’t see beyond himself. He totally disregarded the needs of others. He was foolish because he was blind to the truth. He had forgotten he would be accountable to God. He forgot much had been given to him and that much was expected. He was absorbed with himself and forgot others were in need. Despite all of his own efforts to pile up wealth, his life was not secure.

After this negative example, Jesus developed his teaching with positive examples. People often can become anxious about material things. Anxiety is a lack of trust in God and a lack of interest in God’s Kingdom. Jesus gave two object lessons from nature for us to consider when we are anxious.

For the first example, Jesus called people to think about ravens. To get the full meaning of this example, one needs to know the Jewish mindset about this bird. Ravens were not a prized bird like a chicken. According to Jewish dietary laws, ravens were considered “unclean” because they ate carrion or rotting dead animals. That meant Jews were not supposed to eat ravens. And yet, God still provides food for these lowly creatures. If God gives food to these “unclean” birds, won’t God also see that people are fed? Indeed, that is the will of the Heavenly Father.

Again, consider the wild flowers. They only live a short while, but they have been clothed in beauty by God. Yes, God provides for his creation.

Jesus' object lessons remind us that the Heavenly Father knows our basic daily needs of food, clothing, shelter, medicine and much more. God wants all people to have what they need. Jesus calls us to place our trust in God's promises. As Lutherans we are reminded of these promises when we profess our faith in the words of the First Article of the Creed. Luther concluded this long list of the ways God provides for us with this summary: "All of this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all! For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him."

How does the will of God get done among us? That is, how do all people get their basic needs met daily? Is God's will being done fully among us? Sadly, in this imperfect world, some people are still homeless. Children go to sleep every night hungry. Seniors have to choose whether they will eat or take medicines their doctors have ordered. A gap between God's will and our current reality still exists. An article in the Minneapolis Star/Tribune on 8/12/18 spoke about this extreme poverty despite overall prosperity in this country. The article said

"Some Minnesota social service charities say they are seeing record levels of need — even at a time of low unemployment and overall rising prosperity.

Largely stagnant wages and a growing population of struggling seniors, paired with a housing shortage and rising rents, have pushed the Twin Cities' poorest even lower, nonprofits leaders say.

The largest open-to-the-public free meal program in Minnesota, Loaves & Fishes, is on track to serve a record of 1 million meals this year. That's one-third more than last year. Minnesotans visited food shelves a record 3.4 million times in 2017, more often than even during the recession."

Why is all of this still going on when God's will would be done among us, so all humans would have their daily needs met? The simple answer to this complex question is we still live in a broken and fallen world. The answer sometimes is dressed up in theological jargon. That would go something like God's Kingdom has come already, but it is not yet fully here. Sometimes that is shortened to the phrase "The Kingdom of God is already/not yet."

We can respond to that paradox about the Kingdom of God in two ways. The cop out response is the old saying "the poor will always be with us." That becomes an excuse to do nothing. It's saying, "That's not my concern!" This was the attitude of the foolish rich man in Jesus' parable. This response is selfish and unfaithful. It is the greedy response. It is the "I don't have enough!" way of viewing life.

The other response flows from grace which God has already shown to us. I illustrate this from a recent situation in our extended family. For the past year, Leona's niece has been dating a guy with a 7-year-old daughter named Grace. Last winter we all were at a family funeral. At the end of the service, the pastor invited the congregation to say "grace" before we filed out to the fellowship hall for the luncheon. While I stood in line a few minutes later with Grace and her dad, Grace had a puzzled look on her face. She knew I was

a minister, so the question was put to me. She wanted to know “why had the pastor used her name in the service?” I paused a moment to search for a way to explain this to a 7-year-old. I told her, “Your name means undeserved love.” I added when we say “grace” before a meal, we are saying God has provided this food for us even though we don’t deserve it. This reminds us God loves us and wants our daily needs to be met.

As God’s people we all have been graced with many blessings from the food we eat daily to the most precious blessing God gave, His Son Jesus Christ. We have been blessed richly to be a blessing for others. This is our calling.

In recent years, the ELCA has coined the phrase “God’s work, our hands” to express this calling. This phrase means God has provided for his people and redeemed them through His Son. Now in response to God’s gifts, God’s people, the church, use their God given talents and resources to share these blessings with others we meet in our daily lives. Each member as an individual and each congregation as a collective group is called to assess their God given talents, so we can serve other people in the community where we live and beyond. This is the faith practice of “discernment”. It is moving forward in faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is a call to acknowledge God is not a stingy God. It is a call to acknowledge God’s grace overflows abundantly. As Lutherans, one of our most basic core convictions is this: All of life in Jesus Christ- every act of service, in every daily calling, in every corner of life- flows freely from a living, daring confidence in God’s grace.

How will each of us as individuals and as a group respond to this calling from our God who is full of grace? When we have doubts and times of unfaith like the rich fool, listen again to Jesus parting words in today’s reading.

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms... For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also.”

May we read, mark and inwardly digest these life-giving words each day. As we pray “Thy kingdom come”, we acknowledge God’s kingdom will come without our prayers. We are not somehow manipulating God with our prayers. However, Luther reminds us that when we pray this petition, we are praying that God’s Kingdom may come among us and through us to those we meet in our daily lives. That is what the motto “God’s work, our hands” is attempting to say. When we do this, we are living out our lives in thanksgiving for what God already has done for us. This is the faithful response for all of the abundant grace God has shown to us. God has blessed us richly to be a blessing for others. God has graced us to be grace-full to others daily. This is our calling. May we all be faithful stewards of God’s gifts. Amen!

Now let us recall Jesus’ reassuring words for our daily mission as we sing the next hymn “Have No Fear, Little Flock!”