

October 1st, 2023
World Communion Sunday

Luke 12:13-23 “There Is Enough”

There’s always a lot going on during the first Sunday in October. First of all, it’s usually the first Sunday that doesn’t feel like summer here in Chico. Fall comes a bit later in this part of the world. My friends in Oregon think I’m weird when I say the highs in Chico are “only” in the 80s in September. The first Sunday of October is also the first Sunday of our annual stewardship emphasis. That’s when we start working on building a budget for the kind of ministry we want to accomplish for the upcoming year. It’s also a month we set aside to celebrate the ministry – not just clergy either – but the ministry of the priesthood of *all* believers. And, as you can see by our communion table, it’s also World Communion Sunday where we celebrate the unity of Christ’s church in the world. Let’s tackle that one first. Here’s my “week two Sabbatical church-hopping report” for you: Did you know that Nazarene churches celebrate communion every week? I didn’t know that. I thought weekly communion was a “high church” thing. That’s what Catholics, Anglicans, Episcopalians, and Orthodox churches do along with all their other “smells and bells” rituals. Sure, there are some random American-born Protestant oddballs like the Stone-Campbell heritage churches who have communion every week, but we do it because we have a point to make. We *want* to be the oddballs in the room. It’s our way of saying, “We do this to *welcome* people, not to shut them out!” But I found out there are other Protestant churches out there who enjoy being the oddballs in the room too!

Last week I told you about a church here in town that was, by all appearances, a pretty hard-core evangelical church that had young, hip pastors, stage lighting, projectors, and a praise band that played music right off the Christian Top 40. It was a Nazarene Church. The Sunday I visited was the last week of their study on the Book of Revelation. I thought, “Oh boy, it’s been decades since I’ve heard a good ol’ don’t get left behind, get right with Jesus or burn in the Lake of Fire sermon!”

However, the first slide that came up on the screen was, “Read as the Author Intended: Apocalyptic literature is written to help us interpret our world today in order to give us hope for a future.” Then the pastor went on to explain how the Book of Revelation was not meant to predict future events but rather give hope to those living under the Roman Empire’s shadow. It’s not about us getting caught up and taken to heaven, it’s to show us that the Reign of Man’s hope is incomplete. The reign of God is *already* complete and it’s close at hand ... coming to us. That’s verbatim from the pastor. I was furiously scribbling this all down in the margins of my bulletin. And all around me, people were raising their hands and saying, “Oh yes ... praise Jesus ... hallelujah.” Including me!!! Then later the pastor tackled the subject of Biblical inerrancy and whether you had to accept every word and every story in the Bible as being literally true. He said, “The Bible is full of true things presented in imagery meant to be understood by the people it was written for.” Then he announced that the following week, they were going to start a new series by the same biblical writer as Revelation – they were going to tackle First, Second and Third John ... also known as the books of the, and I quote, “*Johanine tradition!*” Gwen, I’ve got to tell you, I was thinking, “Oh my heavens, I’m going to be slain in the spirit and start speaking in tongues right here on the spot!” But my friend who invited me said, “No, we don’t do that here.” I thought, “I must be missing something. These people are too awesome!” And then, on the rack in the pew in front of me, I noticed these little communion cups like we used to have before we got the chalice shaped ones. I asked my friend, “Oh, is this a week that you take communion?” She said, “Every week is a week we take communion. Just like your church.” I felt like Will Farrell and John C. Reilly in the movie *Step Brothers* when they found out how much they shared in common and said, “Did we just become best friends?” So yes. Today, we celebrate World Communion Sunday where we can be, for at least one day of the year, the church that Jesus prayed would “be one” as God intended. Best friends with the entire body of Christ throughout the world.

There. That was the World Communion Sunday part of the sermon today. Time to talk about stewardship. Our passage from Luke's gospel is an important one in the story of Jesus because it's one where, after hearing it read out loud, we say, "Whoa! That sounds a little harsh!" This story is unique to Luke's gospel. Most of the time, Matthew, Mark and Luke go hand in hand chronologically and there are at least two, sometimes three accounts of the same stories and events. Not here. This passage is all Luke. This happened when Jesus was teaching against some Pharisees and a large crowd had gathered around Jesus. Verse one of this chapter said the crowd was so large that they started trampling on each other. So, there was that tension there already, but Jesus kept on preaching. Anyway, a random person in this very large crowd said, "Jesus, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Jesus basically said, "Who told you to come to me to settle this? This isn't really in my scope of practice." And as he often did, Jesus took the opportunity to tell a parable to make a point. In this parable, a rich man decided to build bigger barns so he could store all the "stuff" he accumulated. Why? So he could, "relax, eat, drink, and be merry." Which sounds like a decent retirement plan, right? But God's question for this "rich fool" is, "Who will be the *beneficiary* of all of this accumulation and *for what purpose*?" This isn't a parable about whether the physical act of this rich man building more storage space is right or wrong, it's about the *reason* behind why he's doing it. This is a parable about the difference between an attitude of scarcity and fear versus an attitude of abundance.

Let's be honest. For many of us, this is a struggle. We often wrestle with a terrifying sense of scarcity that's hovering around us like a fog. We *want* to keep it at bay and live by faith with an attitude of abundance, but then the "what-ifs" kick in and take over. We *want* to boldly declare that God provides, but we *also* want to hoard enough stuff to hold us over for a few weeks or months or years just in case God doesn't provide. You know - just to be safe. "Oh come on Jesse, most of us aren't like that. When it counts the most, we step up to the plate and do the right thing." Sure. The pandemic taught us all about that, right? Two words – "Toilet

Paper.” Another two words to consider – “Bleach Wipes.” How about “Hand Sanitizer?” And it seemed like the ones who hoarded those things the most were the ones who had the most resources to begin with. “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night *your life is being demanded of you*. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.” Ouch. Life isn’t about the treasures we store up for ourselves. Why did the man from the crowd demand that Jesus tell his brother to divide the family inheritance with him? Maybe it was to ensure that he had his “fair share” and this teacher of the Law who spoke with such authority might be able to do him a solid and help him out.

Someone once asked billionaire John D. Rockefeller how much money he considered to be enough. Rockefeller said, “just a little bit more.” He said this in the late 1800s and early 1900s when there were very few billionaires in existence! To this day, adjusting for inflation, he is considered the wealthiest American of all time. At the peak of his wealth, Rockefeller had a net worth of about 1% of the entire US economy. He owned 90% of all the oil & gas industry of his time. Compared to today’s billionaires, Rockefeller makes Bill Gates and Warren Buffett look like paupers. And yet he still wanted “just a little bit more.” And let me remind you, he was a great philanthropist. His foundation helped eradicate hookworm and yellow fever. He was quite a religious person too. He was a faithful member of his church and often volunteered as a janitor. But it still bothers me that, when asked about what he believed is enough, he said “more.”

Last week we talked about how we put God in a box when we realize that we can’t fathom the length, height, breadth, and depth of God. Should it surprise us, then, to consider that we aren’t able to comprehend how God cares and provides for us? “Oh, come on Jesse, don’t go there. Try saying, ‘God provides’ to someone who has nothing and can’t get enough leverage to overcome the poverty, addiction, and all the other things they’ve experienced since their first conscious memories.” You’re right, I probably wouldn’t say that to the person who has nothing

and can't escape their cycle of poverty. However, I might say, "God provides" to the person running over people in Costco with their shopping cart to horde the last case of toilet paper so they can add it to the three cases they already have stored in their garage "just in case." They're the ones who can't seem to understand that God provides. In fact, it's much more likely for the impoverished person to give their last roll of toilet paper to someone who doesn't have any. "This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

Nothing communicates God's abundance more than the first creation story in Genesis 1. The point of this story isn't to provide generations of religious people with enough ammunition to argue the case that the world was created in seven literal days so they can use that information to separate the "real" Christians from the "fake" ones. The point of the creation story is to show people that God provides us with so much abundance that we don't have to toil and work every day of the week ... we can take a day of rest from our work to worship the one who loves us and cares for us enough to make sure our needs are met. The point of the story is to teach God's people to avoid the sin of covetousness and greed which leads to us to operate out of an attitude of scarcity rather than abundance.

When we and other Christians in the world gather at the Lord's table, we accept Jesus' invitation to participate in an act of faith and trust. It requires that we set aside our selfishness and faithlessness, take that which Jesus offers and "divide it among ourselves." In Luke's version of the Last Supper that the elders will read later this morning, *Jesus* did not divide the portion of the bread and wine – he left that for his disciples. This was an act of faith and trust on Jesus' part, and our response, when we divide it among ourselves as we will this morning, is an act of worship that shows we trust that Jesus will provide for us until his return. There *is* and *will be* enough.