

Summerland United Church
August 3, Stepping Out: Step Aside

Threshold and Christ Candle

When we look around this world, we see so much need. Housing insecurity, Food insecurity, addiction, anxiety, loneliness, violence, natural disasters, government corruption, the list feels so endless that stepping out beyond our walls is frightening, overwhelming, numbing. How can we possibly address it all?

We can't do everything, but we can do something. As we'll hear in both our opening prayer and in scripture today, sometimes the best something we can do is step aside and allow God to lead us.

Scripture Reading: Luke 12:13-21

Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth, metaphor or story, listen for the meaning it has for you on this day.

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

¹⁴ But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵ And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich farmer produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And the farmer thought, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' ¹⁸ Then the farmer 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.'

¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'

²⁰ But God said to the farmer, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And to whom will all your accumulated wealth go?' ²¹ This is the way it works for those who accumulate wealth for themselves, but are not rich in God."

Reader: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reflection

The apricot tree in my backyard is huge. It really does need to be pruned by someone who knows what they're doing and made a little more manageable. When we moved

into our house we were excited to have this beautiful fruit tree with its abundance of fruit. Until it started to ripen and then all at once we were completely overwhelmed with apricots and – it turns out, neither myself or husband like apricots all that much – and it also turns out – picking, processing, canning and otherwise dealing with all these apricots – not something that sparks joy.

In fact, last year when there wasn't a single blossom on the tree I was relieved. And this year – it's back with a vengeance – so. Many. Apricots.

I am the currently feeling a lot like the rich farmer whose land produced abundantly and I need a bigger freezer and a lot more canning jars to store all of my abundance. But then to whom would all my accumulated abundance go to? We don't eat a lot of jam, I don't like apricots in my smoothies (I've tried) and tho I'm really stretching the metaphor here, even if I did love apricots and wanted to keep them all to myself, I would be rich in fruit but not rich in God.

Because even if I kept more than enough for my families' needs for this year and even possibly for a year of bad harvest (like last year) this tree still produces more than we could ever need – while if I share the fruit – and please for the love of all that is holy come and pick some of the fruit! – then the hungry will be fed and I will be rich in God. This is the current state our Community of Faith is in. Our abundances are full and overflowing. We have money in the bank from the sale of the Henry St. property and there is more than enough for our future needs – so long as we steward it well.

In the parable of the rich farmer – the farmer builds bigger barns for himself, rather than filling the barn that fits his needs and sharing the surplus he wants to keep it all for himself. Perhaps he's worried about a year or two of bad harvest, which is a fair worry – so keeping aside enough for that as well is good. But if, after that Jesus says, you continue to hoard the abundance you are not rich in God.

So this is our task in the year ahead to both discern the amount of wealth we have to keep for our needs in times of good harvest and bad and then not build a bigger barn – but share that wealth with those in need.

Now, let me be clear I'm not just talking about financial abundance. I'm talking about all of our abundances – our time, our talents, our passions, our visions of ministry here in Summerland and the wider world. All of these need to be stewarded well. Our passion and energy, and our capacity is a vital resource of equal (if not more importance) than the money we can invest in ministry work.

This needs to be a part of our consideration as we continue to discern our future plans for ministry.

In the psalm we heard as our opening prayer today, there were people who were lost and unable to find an inhabited town. They were hungry and thirsty. They cried out to

God and were brought along a direct path to a place of nourishment and abundance. Perhaps the home of the rich farmer who had more than enough to give to others.

What the people in the psalm and hopefully the rich farmer have in common is when they felt lost in sacristy and overwhelmed with abundance they stepped aside a let God lead them. The people in psalms came out of the desert and wastelands, the farmer out of his own ego and fear and shared his wealth with others.

As we discern what is right for us to do with our abundances may we to step aside to allow God to lead us. May we be the farmer rich in God and provide nourishment to those in need.

May it be so.