St. David’s Episcopal Church

Bean Blossom, Indiana

Pentecost 8C, Proper 13 (Track 1)

July 31, 2022

Sermon by the Rev. Kate Wilson

Hosea 11:1-11 Psalm 107:1-9, 43 Colossians 3:1-11 Luke 12:13-21

Good Morning!

What? You don’t think I wear my collar 24/7?

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There is a special irony, or absurdity, in wearing pajamas while preaching about the rich fool of this morning’s Gospel. So let’s start with our reading from Hosea. Hosea reports the words of God to the people of Israel. The readings from the Hebrew Bible for the past few weeks have been frightening, sometimes even horrific, as Amos and Hosea strive to save the peoples of Israel and Judah from the fate their actions are driving. Worshipping Baal and living in sin of every kind, disregarding the God of their covenant to adopt the ways of the Canaanites. The nations will distract themselves with such short-sighted revelry and idolatry that they will be overrun by the Assyrians and by the Babylonian empires. Perhaps they were abandoned by God; or perhaps they were so entrenched in their **self-absorbed ways** that they were oblivious to the realities surrounding them.

God is in mourning. God remembers an earlier time:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. 2The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. 3Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. 4I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them. 5They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me.

Despite the extremity of Israel’s behavior, no matter how much the mourning God wants them to return, they are “bent on turning away from me.” He yearns to lift them like infants to his cheek, to feed them, to nurture them. Instead, they worship Baal, forgetting the simple commandment to love God with their whole hearts and minds and strength, and to love their neighbors. Community, within the covenant with God, was everything. Community, the neighbor, care for widows and orphans, was critical even in the time of Christ, even now. It is “Our Father”, not “My father”. When we hear the word “you” in scripture it is the plural, the collective, not the singular me, my, mine. That is why the error of the sleeping neighbor who would not provide loaves of bread was a negative example to those who heard Jesus’s parable. That is why Jesus consistently spoke against greed, against hypocrisy, against self-serving.

And that brings us to the wealthy farmer who has such a bumper crop his only concern is how to save it for himself. He is overwhelmed with his good fortune. He decides to build even bigger barns for his harvest. Not only will he have more for himself, but he will also be able to signal his wealth to others through his larger, newer, barns. This farmer, too, appears to be “bent on turning away from God”, on luxuriating in his riches, on forgetting about the community, the needy, the struggling. The Lord’s prayer asks for enough to cover our daily needs, not enough to retire. The farmer even says,

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

It’s interesting that he addresses his soul, when it is his body who will enjoy this bounty. That is very telling about where he is, isn’t it?

Now, listen, we are called to wise and generous stewardship. It was life saving that Joseph, overseeing all the lands of Egypt for Pharoah, had the vision of a massive drought and prepared for it, storing the bumper crops of Egypt for the years of famine. That action was one of stewardship and it saved a population and those who came to Egype to survive as well. Nurturing your retirement plan or making regular savings in a college fund is wise stewardship, not idolatry, So let’s not go overboard here.. The difference is that our farmer cares nothing about stewardship; he cares nothing about community or need. He cares only about his wealth, the idol he worships in place of God. And another difference is that the economy of the time was zero-sum. For everything the farmer had, someone else was deprived. And the people knew it.

Jesus provides us with huge, glaring examples of the idolatry of greed, particularly in the Gospel of Luke. Of course we get the point and even laugh at the idiot in the story. Although the disciples were often mystified by the parables Jesus told, they are more often than not clear as a bell; it is difficult to miss the point. The farmer plans to “relax, eat, drink, and be merry”, but he forgets that he is quoting Isaiah, and Isaiah used it as a warning, adding, “for tomorrow you will die.” If talking to this farmer, Isaiah might add, “While you submerged yourself in your success, while you conveniently forgot your covenant with God, you did it all in vain, leaving you with nothing.” Jesus did not quote the complete statement from Isaiah, but he ended the parable with the same ironic death.

Since most of us are not agribusiness giants, or pharmaceutical CEOs charging outrageous fees for formulation developments long, long paid for, we do have to think a little more deeply and honestly about the idols we have worshipped. Paul’s letter to the Colossians spells out the details more specifically if not completely.

“So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth[.]”

With a bit of reflection, we know that work can be not just a means of joy and sustenance, but an idol commanding all our time and thought and energy, leaving nothing for our “loved ones” or for God. We know that addictive substances can become an all-absorbing idol, or gambling, or sex. The problem is not the behavior, it is that we attempt to fill a void that is God-sized with teaspoons of mistaken hope. We can also come up with loads of examples in our consumer-oriented, politically abusive society of people who are living in greed in the same scale as the farmer, or who make him look like a beginner. We are here to concern our souls and our peace, and to see how we can amend the disparities of greed as they impact others, loving them as we love ourselves.

So where are we? We are at a point of reflection to see what tuning our lives is calling for. God is still yearning to raise us up, to feed us, to hold us to God’s cheek, and love us. God is still yearning for us to put aside our idols of whatever names they bear, and to become God centered again. That is always the call and always the reward.

Embrace God through the Christ of this altar, receiving Christ wholly through the bread and wine that is his body and blood. For now, and as you go through this day and this week, bring your mind and soul back to center on God. Even in funny clothes and singing a bit off-key, God will welcome us home.

Thanks be to God.