

Sermon Title: *In dryness and in plenty*

Luke 12:22-34

²² He said to his disciples, ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁶If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ²⁸But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

³² ‘Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is God’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Amos 5:21-24

²¹ I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

²² Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon.

²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Let Justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream

Justice, the establishment of what is right and equitable for all to flourish; and righteousness, that sense of personal morality that takes seriously a life interconnected with how God has ordered life. Sometimes we separate these two, justice and righteousness. We think of ‘righteousness’ as what some did on Tuesday, filling boxes at the Food Bank, and justice as what some did here on Wednesday, discussing the war games plan of the Air Force. Justice as the public and political actions; righteousness as the personal acts of morality and mercy.

Justice, what Dr. Cornell West calls “what love looks like in public.”

And righteousness, living with virtue and honesty in and through everything that we do.

Let the flourishing of all roll down like waters, and morality like an ever-flowing stream

An image of life, of refreshment – an image that is perpetual, continual – a perpetual stream of life and renewal.

The prophets were poets. They did not speak or write creeds of belief or volumes of systematic theology – they spoke of lions lying with lambs, with imagery and metaphor, trying to help people see beyond what is and imagine a world, living together in the ways of God; metaphors that were meant to cause us to lament and grieve much of what is; images meant to inspire us to

keep seeking to reorient ourselves toward the ways of God – to keep seeking the reality which Jesus called, “The Kingdom of God,” that it might be on earth as it is in heaven.

Let justice flow down like waters, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

I am no prophet – some of you here are, but I am not. But as a pastor, one of my responsibilities is to listen to the prophets (both the prophets of today, and the prophets of old); to try and help us be shaped and molded by the message of the prophets. And as I think of my own life of discipleship, of trying to follow a bit more the God I meet in Jesus Christ, one of the metaphors that has sustained me these past few years came from Renee Johns during a Children’s Time. It is a metaphor that I continue to think of every time I wonder, what good is any of this doing – will this action make a difference at all. It is an image I want to rekindle in our imaginations today.

**Here I set-up a pully system with two buckets. In one bucket I placed large rocks as I spoke.*

That our lives, our community, our world are weighted down by these giant “Powers”, by these ‘isms’ that feel unmoveable: by **Militarism, Consumerism, Racism, Sexism; Self-centeredness** and **Selfishness**.

And what we have to offer in the face of these boulders (mountains), feel like only pebbles (at best); perhaps more like grains of sand. That in the face of something like the worst refugee crisis since WWII, all we have to offer are phone calls, congressional visits, organizing, letter writing, prayers, donations, sending of quilts and refugee relief kits. These often feel so small,

like grains of sand, in the face of loss of life, violence, and governments tightening up those they will allow in more and more.

But we still drop in our small offering of sand, remembering with Reinhold Niebuhr, that “**Nothing that is worth doing** can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope.”

-The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. -MLK

-We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. -Oscar Romero

But we are called to faithfulness. That is the calling of discipleship – the calling of faithfulness. Not the calling of results. Not the calling of seeing where the strategy will all come together in the end, but the calling is to strive for the kingdom of God. As Oscar Romero said, this is the difference between the Master Builder and the worker. And we are workers – we more often than not will not see it all come together. Our calling as followers of Jesus is to take the tools at our disposal, our skills and time and resources – and drop a few specks of sand into the bucket of a more loving, just, righteous and kind world.

And of course, this image (the two buckets on a pulley) helps us to image how our little bits of sand, eventually – when joined with all the other little bits of sand – one day will start to tip the scales (or, pulley system in this case).

We have our friend Teresa here who encouraged us to consider how we might further the cause of getting tens of thousands of Idahoans health insurance.¹ About 2 years ago I was at the State Capital with a couple of other pastors and a handful of people “in the healthcare gap” of Idaho – people working, but not making enough money for insurance. And these faithful people, they had been to the capital countless other times to speak with law-makers and give testimony and share their stories. And one reporter asked, “you are here once again, you have shared your stories so many times – do you really think this is going to make any difference, what you are doing today?”

It was this image that came to my mind, as I answered, “we are just here trying to drop a few more grains of sand onto the scales of justice, never knowing when the scales will start to tip.”

When I read these words of Jesus on, “Consider the lilies of the fields, how they grow, they neither toil nor spin.” These words of “do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow has enough worries of his own.” I find here a message of faithfulness, attend to what God has given to you, attend to your part – it is not up to us how it all turns out in the end. Just keep dropping your grains of sand. Attend to our piece today and let tomorrow worry about itself.

As I have tried to write sermons for this series on ‘Discipleship’, it has been tough – it has been a slog of feeling not super inspired by what I am reading and trying to communicate message of

¹ We had a volunteer from ‘Close the Gap’ with us, looking for volunteers for canvassing and phone-banking for Medicaid expansion.

discipleship – and last week, it started to feel more clear that I think the bulk of that reason is that I feel pretty stagnant in my life as a disciple at this moment in time. There are times when we feel like we are growing: when we are searching answers to particular questions; when we are seeking out new practices of prayer; when we are taking part in new social action; when we are meeting people who are inviting us deeper into action or helping us reflect in new ways; times when we might read an author or hear a speaker who is giving us language or helping us see a bit differently. Many moments when we feel growth and change happening.

And there are times when it feels like we are just hanging on – when family, or work, or care-taking, or grieving, or our own health, or school, or answering emails, or a collection of so many things are taking up all the capacity we have. When, we don't feel like we have much left to offer. Even without worrying about results, I am not feeling like I am faithfully offering much in ways of discipleship.

There are of life when we go to Iraq with Christian Peacemaker Teams and have our eyes opened in new ways, when we have so much new to reflect on. And then there are times when the only miracle you are really hoping for is your child to take a nap, so that you too can take a nap.

One of the great things about my role at Corpus Christi House is relating to the Jesuit Volunteers, young adults who are a year or two out of college, doing a year of service – young adults who are wanting to make a difference in the world; who are asking big questions of life and themselves – who are on the search for pebbles to drop into the bucket of a more loving and just world.

And it is interesting, being at a different point in life, but not that far removed from their point in life. In these great and important life conversations I have with the Jesuit Volunteers, I often find myself thinking, “a lot of life is going to the grocery store and getting the laundry done.” That is not trying to say that I am thinking, “wait until you are older, you won’t be so idealistic.” Not at all. These are important conversations and these young adults have important things for us to hear. It is saying, there are times when we feel our lives of discipleship growing in leaps in bounds – times when we feel like we have so much to pour into this bucket of a more loving and just world. And there are times when we cannot even imagine an ever-flowing stream, we would settle for the smallest creek – for tiniest trickle.

And so I guess what I am trying to say to myself this morning, with this poorly constructed pulley and bucket system – is that even in my dryness, even in a time when I am feeling like a stalled disciple – that my tiny little grain of sand is still so important to offer.

-That caring for an aging parent is not separate from your life as a disciple, it is part of it.

-That being a loving health-care professional, or teacher or therapist is not separate from your life of faith, it is part of it

-That being an honest and righteous builder or landlord or investor or broker is not separate from your life as a disciple, it is part of it

-That trying to help raise a niece or nephew or son or daughter or grandchild up in the ways of the God we meet in Jesus Christ is not separate from your life as a disciple

Those are all pieces of how we are, ever so slowly, creating a more loving and just world in-line with the Kingdom of God. It is not just with elections and campaigns and cases that go to the Supreme Court – it is with each impulse of love that we act upon. It is with each card we send. Each political phone call we make or email we send, even as we wonder if it makes any bit of difference at all.

Even in our times of extended dryness or uncertainty – let us not underestimate the importance of our small acts of discipleship – let us not forget how our smallest impulses of love are joining in with the grains of sand of each one here; joining with the faithful acts of our sisters and brothers around the world; joining with the faithful acts of the saints who came before us (saints both known and unknown).

Until eventually, the dam is broken, and justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.