

Sermon, St. David's, 7/31/2022, Luke 12:13-21 (Elizabeth Felicetti)

I have preached a lot of funerals over fifteen years of professional ministry for parishioners whom I loved dearly as well as for people I didn't know well and even a few whom I did not know at all. I try to tie stories of the person's life up with discipleship, with God's love. I'm grateful for the opportunity as a pastor to look back on someone's life and say a few words about how they and God intersected and try to position their beautiful story in the story of God's story with the whole world.

In the parable we just heard from the Gospel of Luke, God says to the rich man building larger barns to store his stuff "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things they have prepared, whose will they be?"

In all of my funeral homilies, I have never preached, "This beloved child of God had some lovely big barns." Or a lovely house. I've talked about how they loved their families, about the way they laughed, about how much they loved serving the chalice. About their love of storytelling, the way they taught others to be bold. And occasionally about quirks that involved possessions, like once I preached about my friend Johnny's ukulele collection, but other than that, I don't preach about how wealthy someone was or how many possessions they had, because Jesus preaches against money and possessions more than anything else in the Bible.

Some sects of Christianity focus on fringe things like sexuality when the overall message is absolutely one that is against hoarding money and possessions. Yet that is a struggle for all of us in this room. I know it is for me. I'm a book hoarder. When my mom was alive and I lived in California, she was convinced that I would be in an earthquake and get crushed to death by my books. I wonder what would be said about me at my funeral if that happened?

What do you hope people say about you at your funeral? We are a death-denying culture, and I used to be judgmental about that fact until I contracted lung cancer at the beginning of the pandemic and had to truly face my own death, which I thought I had done but realized is hard to grasp until it truly happens to you. Still, "what do you hope people say about you at your funeral" does not have to be a morbid, negative question, but rather an opportunity to examine our priorities. What do we value?

My own brush with death helped me to prioritize. I am still the rector here because I love this church and find our ministry together meaningful. I also work fewer hours now, am paid less, and am endeavoring to live a more balanced life: that is, to not put this church first in my life. To realize that putting God first does not always mean putting the church first.

The pandemic has forced many of us to reevaluate our priorities, and some have taken this idea of untangling God from church too far and have dropped church all together. As Christians, we are called to keep God and Jesus at the center of our lives, not just our Sundays or the hour that we set aside to watch the livestream.

Some might wonder why Jesus seems to be anti-preparation in this parable, but if you look at how often the man uses the word "I" and "my" you will see that the parable is about possessions, selfishness, and greed, not preparation. What should *I* do? *I* have no place to store *my* crops. *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. I will say to my soul...*” I I I my my my. Nothing about God. Nothing about family. Nothing about neighbors. Nothing about feeding a village. This wealthy man wants to build up earthly treasure, which is foolish, because earth is not our permanent home.

We are stewards, not permanent residents. We are stewards for God, caring for this place until our life is demanded of us. What will you leave behind? What can you take with you? What will I—or someone else—say about you at your funeral?

We can look at this as a church as well. We may call St. David’s our permanent church home, but at some point, I am going to retire. Some of us will move away, and eventually, all of us will die. What kind of church will we leave behind?

St. David’s is not a marble altar kind of church. We don’t have paid singers or a pipe organ. But this place holds my heart. I like the size. I like the love. I like that a long-ago parishioner made the wooden altar and another parishioner made the coverings. I like that instead of going with a pre-packaged Cokesbury Vacation Bible School, Dana Blackman decorated for Vacation Bible School using her talents—I love how it looks so much that we have not taken it down.

I like the vocal children in our church and the labyrinth in the prayer garden and I like vocal children riding tricycles on the labyrinth. God’s grace is in every direction that I look here at St. David’s.

We aren’t a bigger-barn church. I don’t want to belong to a big-barn church. I don’t want to serve a rich fancy church, but I do want to serve a church that is rich toward God. I think we are that kind of place. I want to spend the rest of my career in ministry helping to make St. David’s a place that is rich toward God.

The rich man in the parable told his soul to relax because he had ample goods stored up. I don’t think a relaxed soul is necessarily a healthy soul. What does your soul long for? What non-tangible stuff do you hope to leave behind in this world, and are you on the right path for that to happen?