



Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Scripture Texts for the Day:

Today's first reading comes from the book of Genesis, chapter 12, verses 1 through 3 (often referred to as the Call of Abraham, the Father of our Faith).

Genesis 12:1-3 ¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

The word of the Lord (Thanks be to God).

The second reading comes from 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 St. Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 ¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

The word of the Lord (Thanks be to God).

Our Gospel text for today comes from the Gospel according to St. Luke, the 12th chapter beginning at the 13th verse:

Luke 12:13-20 ¹³ Someone in the crowd said to [Jesus], "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 man produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ Then he 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 him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’

*The Gospel of our Lord (**Praise to you oh Christ**)*

About the Preacher:

Hello. My name is Pastor Keith Pearson and I am the Regional Gift Planner for the ELCA Foundation, serving congregations and other ELCA ministries in your area.

I work with congregations interested in establishing and growing their endowment funds and other long-term savings for funding their ministries. I also work with individuals and families who would like to learn about fueling the work of their church and other worthy charities through non-cash gifts of assets (such as real estate, securities or stocks, and other valuables), and through estate-based gifts such as wills, trusts and bequests.

The theologian Frederick Buechner once wrote this about our Christian calling or vocation: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”

It is my job as a Gift Planner to be your guide as you and your congregation navigate toward that intersection of your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger.

I’m not here to sell you anything or to ask you to give a gift to the ELCA or any of its many ministries. I am purely a servant of the church and a guide to help you navigate to that place to which God is calling you.

Thank you for welcoming me into your worship service today. It’s an honor to be here with you, even if only through the good and Godly gift of technology. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, oh God. Amen!

Sermon by Rev. Keith Pearson, ELCA Regional Gift Planner **August 1, 2021**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen!

As Lutherans we talk a lot about callings or vocation – that divine voice that speaks to us and guides our lives to that special purpose to which God is calling us. Callings are not just a special thing for pastors. We all have them.

In the first reading we hear Abraham’s call and we hear not just where or to what purpose, task or destination God is calling Abraham, it also names a promise of blessings that will come along with the answer to that call:

1. a **land** of his own;
2. **heirs** (children, grand children, great grand children and so on and so on) heirs that would form a nation,
3. a **great name** (fame and fortune).

But there is one more thing: the reason or purpose. It wasn't just that God really liked Abraham and wanted to give him a bunch of personal favors. No, all these blessings were for a deeper purpose:

4. God says, "I will bless you... and **in you all the families of the Earth shall be blessed.**" Abraham was blessed to be a blessing and so are we.

The second reading, part of Paul's letter giving instruction and encouragement to one of his fledgling churches in the Greek city of Corinth was another call story, but this one was a calling or vocation for not just one individual but a whole community, not unlike that of your congregation. He uses the image of the human body and all the parts and pieces that make up this amazing work of God's creation. My wife and I have been enjoying watching the Olympics and it's impossible not to marvel at these examples of what a marvel the human body truly is (or can be). But this year's events also reminded me of how even these finely tuned, painstakingly trained, amazingly gifted athletes can have their performance damaged, or even completely destroyed by a relatively small injury or illness. I hear Paul's urging for us to be one body and how we all need one another – not despite our differences but because of them – and I think of how divided we are as a nation, as Christ's church, and even as families. I hear the urgency of St. Paul's appeal, his command: One cannot say to the other, "I have no need of you." We cannot stand aside and say, "I am not part of you." We are one body. If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one is honored we all rejoice.

And then there is Jesus' parable in the reading from Luke's Gospel – often referred to as "The Parable of the Rich Man" which makes it easy to separate ourselves from the implications of the story. But I assure you, Jesus wasn't talking about someone else, he is talking to you (even if you don't consider yourself rich, a man or a farmer).

Now, I do have to say, most of the farmers I know absolutely HATE this parable. You see a lot of them do a lot of tearing down old barns, granaries, and silos so they can build new, larger ones to store their crops and machinery (all of which seem to grow larger and larger each year). But this parable is not about barns.

The other thing that seems to trouble people is a sense you can get from the parable is that it is somehow bad to put away savings or that it is wrong to enjoy the fruits of your labor in a more relaxed lifestyle once you retire. But this parable is not about retirement.

So, what is it about?

I believe Jesus is acting here in the role of teacher. He is being the consummate Jewish Rabbi surrounded by eager students and so he teaches in traditional rabbinical fashion. He has been asked a question and rather than answer it with a direct answer he instead tells a story and then asks the students a question. And the question he asks is designed to make the students think more deeply about the original question. This sort of teaching forces the student to think more broadly about the complications and fuller implications of the answer. When you are the student and a Rabbi or teacher

tells you a story and then asks a question, the two are intertwined and there is likely more than one question wrapped up in this discourse.

So now it's my turn. I'm going to tell you a story (this same story) but I will tell it 3 times and each time I will ask a different question of the story. I'll even give you the question first so you know what to look for in the story:

Telling #1: What's missing?: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly.¹⁷ And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?'¹⁸ Then he 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 him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

Again, What's missing? Answer: Family, Community, workers, the poor, the land itself

Telling #2: Whose will those "things" be (to whom will they belong) next? : "The land of a rich man produced abundantly.¹⁷ And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?'¹⁸ Then he 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 him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

Again, Whose will those "things" be (to whom will they belong) next? Answer: This is sort of a trick question. The answer is, The same as before: God's things. All these things were God's to begin with. The "Rich Man" was only the caretaker of those "things" just as we are caretakers of all that God places in our care.

Telling #3: Is the rich fool dying or about to die? I'll read just the last few verses this time:²⁰ 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?'

Is the "rich fool" dying or about to die? Answer: Maybe, but not necessarily.

The setting is almost dream like. It is evening, and in Jewish traditional reckoning, the day begins at sunset. So when God says, "this very night your life is being demanded of you" He is saying it at what is the beginning of a new day. Also important here are the symbolism of light and darkness. Darkness and light can be symbolic of death and life, ignorance and wisdom, just to name a few.

Earlier in the text, before he launched into the parable, Jesus said, "...one's **life** does not **consist** in the abundance of **possessions**." And then in the parable the rich man says to himself, "...I will say to my soul, **Soul**, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." The word in ancient Hebrew that we translate as **Soul** is *nefish*. It literally means "**essence**." So looking at those two phrases Jesus seems to be telling us that life, **our essential life**, our **core inner self** is not made up of or evaluated by the amount (or lack of) possessions. Those things, after all, belong to God anyway. We are merely caretakers of them.

So then if "**Life**," your life, your existence, the essential you, has nothing to do with wealth or possessions, then what does it **consist** of?

And for that matter, what does it mean for God to “**demand**” his life of him? It could mean to claim this rich fool’s life and give his body over to death. But it could also mean claiming him and his life for God’s own purpose while he still lives.

If you think about Abraham and the promise, the covenant, the inheritance and blessing God gave Abraham was given so that he would be a blessing to all nations and that through him all nations, all the families of the earth, would be blessed. In that promise God claimed Abraham’s life, not to give him up to death but to put his life to work for God’s own purpose.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, you are inheritors of that same promise. You have been blessed in ways great and small. Your life itself is a gift from God who we confess to be the maker of all things in heaven above and the earth below. The essence of life, your life, is to be a caretaker of that inheritance for the good of yourself, your loved ones, and all of God’s children, literally all the families of the earth and even creation itself.

And there are no exclusions no family favorites. As Paul told us, we are all members of the one body. We cannot say to anyone else, “I have no need of you.” If one suffers we all suffer. If one rejoices we all rejoice. That is the essence of life – your life.

And so through the parable, though the words were spoken over 2000 years ago, Jesus speaks them again to you. *“This very night, this beginning of a new day, your very life – your essence, your soul, is being demanded of you.”* You have been built for God’s own purpose. Ask yourself the same questions I asked of the parable and ask them of your own life story:

What’s missing? Family, community, fellow workers in the world, the poor, creation itself.

Those things you have, and the things you’ve prepared, to whom do they really belong and are they being used as God intended?

Are you dying? Is this your baptismal moment for dying to yourself and rising to a new life in Christ Jesus? God is calling you. Like Abraham, you have been blessed to be a blessing to others. Like Paul reminded his congregation in Corinth, so too he reminds this congregation: You are all members of one body. You cannot say to the other, “I have no need of you.” You cannot say “I am not a part of you (your suffering, your pain, your hunger, your need do not affect me).” We are part of the same body and if one suffers we all suffer or if one rejoices we all rejoice.

Indeed, your life is being demanded of you. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself. Amen!