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Narrative Lectionary 4.52 – Stewardship 03/03

2 September 2018

Luke 12:13-34

Salem, Bridgeport

“Enlarge Your Vision beyond Your Fear”

Today we conclude our 3 week series on Stewardship, designed to help us overcome worry, grief, and fear.

*<sup>15</sup>Then Jesus told the crowd, “Avoid greed in all its forms. Your life is not made more secure by what you have — no matter how much that is.” [<sup>16</sup>He went on to tell them this parable...] “There was a rich farmer who had a good harvest. <sup>17</sup>‘What will I do?’ the farmer mused. I have no place to store my harvest. <sup>18</sup>I know! I’ll pull down my grain bins and build larger ones. All my grain and goods will go there. <sup>19</sup>Then I’ll say to myself: You have blessings in reserve for many years to come. Relax! Eat, drink and be merry!’”*

So what do you notice about this rich farmer?

(He’s greedy, self-centered, it’s “I, I, I”, doesn’t mention anyone else, doesn’t seem to be in relation to anyone else, not concerned with anyone else, feels secure within his own little world so there’s no need to relate to others.)

In many ways this describes the congregations in which some of us grew up – they were pretty much self-sufficient.

They had plenty of people and programs, and while they may have worried about budgets now and again, in the end they always seemed to end up with enough - sometimes enough to store away for a rainy day.

Sure, they may gotten together with other congregations for special celebrations, but there were very clear lines that were never crossed –

keeping their own “barns” separate from others was important.

And those congregations kept doing things in the same ways they had always done things, relaxing, enjoying congregational life, and trusting that life would continue just as it was.

*But the parable continues: <sup>20</sup>“...God said to the farmer. You fool! This very night your life will be required of you. To whom will all your accumulated wealth go?’ <sup>21</sup>This is the way it works with people who accumulate riches for themselves, but are not rich in God.*

*You fool! This very night your life will be required of you. To whom will all your accumulated wealth go?’*

And that is what happened to so many congregations in mainline denominations,

in our synod, and right here in Bridgeport: First English, and St. Paul’s, and St. Mark’s.

I can speak with certainty about St. Paul’s because I was there –

and they did indeed think that they were trying to reach out.

But their motivation, like the rich farmer in the parable,

was not centered on God’s will but on their own survival.

Their efforts were not about reaching out to share their riches and power with others,

but simply about getting more people in the pews, and more money in the offering plates, so they could sustain themselves.

God’s question: ‘To whom will all your accumulated wealth go?’

is the key to this passage for it directs us in 2 ways –

it directs us outside of ourselves, and it directs us towards the future.

At the Global Leadership Summit I attended last month, one of the speakers was T. D. Jakes, a visionary, provocative thinker and entrepreneur,

who is the Founder and Senior Pastor of a global humanitarian organization & a 30,000-member church, and who has been named “America’s Best Preacher” by TIME Magazine.

I want to share with you some of what he had to say.

God's question 'To whom will all your accumulated wealth go?'

directs the rich farmer and us outside of ourselves

and Jakes explains it this way: **Believe in a vision beyond your own provision.**

It's not enough to think about just ourselves and our own lives;

we need to be thinking about how we can have a life-changing impact on others

and maybe even change the world.

The Wright brothers worked in a bicycle shop.

They could have kept working in that shop, making bicycles.

The work would have been enough to support and sustain them.

But they weren't satisfied with just supporting and sustaining themselves.

They wanted to do something that would impact the lives of others.

something that they believed would change the world.

As God's people, we are called to do the same:

**to believe in a vision beyond our own provision.**

Our vision needs not only to extend to others, but it needs to be future oriented – and large.

Jakes says: **Your vision needs to be achievable but not necessarily believable.**

If your current vision is comfortable, it's too small.

It should be annoying, frustrating, tormenting.

It should be so big that you're careful who you share it with.

For me, my vision at the age of 3 was to be a pastor just like my dad.

Back in those days before our denomination ordained women, the vision was not believable;

yet here I am – blessed to be the pastor of this wonderful congregation!

My unbelievable vision turned out to be achievable after all!

Jakes reminds us again of the Wright brothers

who looked up into the air and imagined a machine that could fly.

It didn't matter there was not even a name for it.

It didn't matter they had to start from scratch,

and they sometimes were pushed outside of their comfort zone. .

It didn't matter that it was a dream so big it seemed ridiculous to others.

They dreamed of something that would do more than support and sustain their own lives,

and even more than impact the lives of others.

They dreamed of something that would change the world.

**Our vision needs to be achievable but not necessarily believable.**

The bigger the dreams, of course, the bigger the fears.

But Jesus says to us, <sup>32</sup>“*Fear not, little flock, for it has pleased your Abba to give you the kingdom.*”

Jakes puts it this way: **When we are petrified we are also electrified.**

Our vision needs to be big enough to scare us.

So much of what we learn is about winning, but what stimulates growth is losing.

Don't be afraid to lose.

If we never trip, we don't learn to walk.

We will learn more thru losing than through winning.

Failures always have a residual learning and it's the failures that get us ready to succeed later.

The Wright brothers were inspired by eagles, which nest on cliffs,

and after the eggs hatch, the parents kick the kids out of the house.

It's a rough transition, a scary proposition.

Eaglets don't learn how to fly by flying, they learn to fly by falling.

They don't practice a few feet above ground; there's no safety net in case they fall down.

The eaglets are not trying to fly, they are simply trying not to die.

They're pushed off the cliff into nothing but air, not knowing then that they're in God's care.

They flap and fall and fall some more... and then they fly and then they soar.

**When we are petrified we are also electrified.**

Up until the last few years, Salem was very similar to First English and St. Paul's and St. Mark's, but we have been most mercifully blessed, for our soul has not yet been required of us! We've been given the precious gift of more time – more time to travel through the wilderness to the promised land, more time to be rich towards God, more time to enlarge our barns and our vision beyond ourselves to others, beyond the present moment to the future, and beyond our small dreams to ones that could actually change the world (well at least Bridgeport!)

Will we experience fear?

Of course.

Sometimes we are going to feel like those eaglets hurtling ever faster towards the ground.

But like the eaglets, while we're falling, we are still in God's care.

Jakes reminds us:

- \* **we need to believe in a vision beyond our own provision;**
- \* **our vision needs to be achievable but not necessarily believable; and**
- \* **when we are petrified we are also electrified.**

Jesus says, "*Fear not, little flock, for it has pleased your Abba to give you the kingdom.*"

Just think about that: God has given us the kingdom!!!

And Jake concludes:

Don't let your fears fence in your dreams.

The dream creates the mystery and the adventure and the excitement in the journey.

Believe in the infinite power of absolute possibilities – in the infinite power and boundless love of God.

Trust in God, jump off the cliff, and soar!

Do it. Right here. Right now. **Amen**