



Sunday July 31, 2022

“All that you can’t leave behind”

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23 & Luke 12:13-21

[Amy Kim Kyremes-Parks](#)

Luke 12:13-21

Someone from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

Jesus said to him, “Man, who appointed me as judge or referee between you and your brother?”

Then Jesus said to them, “Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one’s life isn’t determined by one’s possessions, even when someone is very wealthy.” Then he told them a parable: “A certain rich man’s land produced a bountiful crop. He said to himself, What will I do? I have no place to store my harvest! Then he thought, Here’s what I’ll do. I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That’s where I’ll store all my grain and goods. I’ll say to myself, You have stored up plenty of goods, enough for several years. Take it easy! Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself. But God said to him, ‘Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself?’ This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren’t rich toward God.”

This last week has been full. It started with Family Faith Time here at Grace Covenant. Family Faith Time was a little like Vacation Bible School for Families. We started on Sunday after worship then met Monday and Tuesday Night as well. Each day we shared a meal, sang, shared a story from scripture and interacted with the lesson and one another through activities.

During our Faith Sharing you heard us recall the stories and lessons that we learned from. The story of the Prodigal Son, Jesus and the Greatest Commandment and the story of Orpah, Naomi and Ruth. All familiar and yet new through the lens of practicing compassion.

I have been in youth and children's ministry for 25 years and it is my experience that if we are not equipping families with a language and practice of faith it doesn't quite matter what we do on Sunday morning or in our programming. No one is good at anything they are not practicing....

Then we hear the parable read by Natalily and Anna and in our Lectionary readings it is paired with this gem from the wisdom literature of Ecclesiastes.

From Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23

Perfectly pointless, says the Teacher, perfectly pointless.

Everything is pointless.

I am the Teacher. I was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

I applied my mind to investigate and to explore by wisdom all that happens under heaven. It's an unhappy obsession that God has given to human beings.

When I observed all that happens under the sun, I realized that everything is pointless, a chasing after wind.

I hated the things I worked so hard for here under the sun, because I will have to leave them to someone who comes after me. And who knows whether that one will be wise or foolish? Either way, that person will have control over the results of all my hard work and wisdom here under the sun. That too is pointless. I then gave myself up to despair, as I thought about all my laborious hard work under the sun, because sometimes those who have worked hard with wisdom, knowledge, and skill must leave the results of their hard work as a possession to those who haven't worked hard for it. This too is pointless—it's a terrible wrong. I mean, What do people get for all their hard work and struggles under the sun? All their days are pain, and their work is aggravation; even at night, their hearts don't find rest. This too is pointless.

Pointless-Despair-Pain-Aggravation-Insomnia... Not exactly the Lord is my Shepherd huh?

It's the end of July. Our summer has been full. Many of you have been able to travel for the first time in years, visiting places and people that bring you joy. Marcia, our Senior Pastor is away on Sabbatical-making space and practicing self care during a lectionary season that is anything but ordinary. Tami, Richard, Jeff and I have been left with some doozies from scripture, challenging our sense of stability while calling us into deeper understanding and action.

Awe- summer, the time for us to read from Holy scripture that life is pointless and there is no guarantee that our toil is worth a thing. Thanks be to God!

And while I am being a little snarky, I also know that this is the narrative of our ancestors in the faith- we are not the only ones who have felt hopeless and questioned what the point is to all we are doing. And yet, we also know that Jesus implores us to stay alert and resist the inclination towards acrimony and inaction around every corner.

It doesn't take much for me to make a list of the many issues and injustices there are threatening to further diminish our humanity while heightening our sense of acrimony with it all:

Let's get it out now.....on the chat, here in person...hollar out all the things that you can think of.....(listen, repeat, read from chat) [SHOW THE CHAT](#)

All of this.....ALL OF THIS-

Why toil for anything when its effects and enduring value are so far from assured? What is the point of working for anything when we can't guarantee that those who come after us will carry on our work? And if we don't have control over what happens after us is it even worth the energy?

And then there is the everyday energy of living.

We have to take care of ourselves and our families, but if that is all we are doing we are missing it entirely.

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The parable from Luke continues to inform us... the author of Luke is not neutral in regards to accumulating wealth. People who become rich by exploitation, to enhance status, to enjoy lavish excursions and possessions are not deemed as helpful and in many ways are deemed as life threatening. Unfortunately, the fear of scarcity many Americans have is nothing to the lived experiences of those who actually live in scarcity.

Later on in Luke, Jesus questions the disciples 9:25 "What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?" This text is foreshadowing what happens when we stop practicing and just get by... we forfeit our humanity, the image of God that is in all of us.

Siblings, our everyday life is always intertwined with the lives of others and with God...whether we subscribe to that or not. Let me say that again.

We may read these passages and use them as a crutch for our current exhaustion but it is a call for us to get over ourselves and keep practicing.

We prioritized three days of teaching our children about compassion, how to foster and practice compassion even when it's hard because frankly there are not enough examples of compassion in our everyday experience. And these children - they will take our lead - is it worthy of following? The compassion our kids have is only limited by the inactivity and non-practicing adults in the world.

During this week of wrestling with the sermon Allan Boesak kept circling in my head. Allan Boesak is the principal author of the Belhar Confession that was adopted by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1982 in opposition of apartheid in South Africa. Thirty years later the Presbyterian Church adopted this confession into our canon of confessions marking a movement within our church to speak and confess our understanding of our call to social justice.

At the annual meeting of the General Assembly of the PCUSA he recalled the struggles of black South Africans to remain faithful and pursue unity in

light of terrible oppression, mass detention and cruel policies (sound familiar?), Boesak said: *“The church became directly involved in the efforts of freedom and justice in South Africa. The Jesus we worship and confess as Lord in the sanctuary is the Jesus we take into the street. Our people were slaughtered. Everyone was touched in one way or another.”*¹

*“By 1986 we saw no sense in, and had no desire for, unity with the white church, or with white people in general,” he said of the general despair that afflicted the Dutch Reformed Missionary Church. “But we had Belhar, and Belhar understood Calvin as he spoke of Holy Communion. ‘Christ has only one body of which he makes us all partakers.’”*¹

Calling the unity of the church both a gift and command, Boesak said it was difficult to find points of unity or reconciliation with those who were actively opposing the rights of black South Africans.

*“Belhar understood from Isaiah that God is not only a God of justice, but that God is a God of indivisible justice,” he said. “So against our self-absorbed instinct for self-absorbed victimhood, the black church confessed God as a God who wants to bring forth peace and justice in the world, and that God calls the church to follow in this, that the church must stand next to people in any form of need or injustice.”*¹

I heard Allan Boesak speak to a group of church leaders prior to the adoption of the Belhar Confession into the confessions of the Presbyterian Church USA.

The moment and words I will never forget are at the end of his message when he said his biggest fear is meeting Christ face to face and having Jesus ask “Where are your scars? You see if you have no scars it means there was nothing worth fighting for.

Grace Covenant. There is so much worth fighting for and I know you are tired and weary and yet it is our collective call to liberation....

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¹ <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/6/23/allan-boesak-commends-belhar-confession/>

When we come together online or in person WE are resisting the urge to throw our hands up and say it is all pointless, because we know we can do better. We have to do better.

And it is clear that we need a stronger power than that of ourselves...
amen?

Our toil needs to be out of hope for possibility rather than despair... God is still near and is constantly offering us opportunities to repent and heal. And it is not enough for us to gather, to learn together, to be challenged and then not go out into this world and practice what we hear in this space and know to be part of the healing of the world.

My sermon title is "*All That You Can't Leave Behind.*" The image is amusing to me for so many reasons....and it is also sad.

Most of us at one time or more have tried to take more than would fit or more than we would need for the journey. We convince ourselves that this has to go or what if we need this or we couldn't possibly leave this behind. If we are not careful, we end up like this car with hardly any room for those who travel with us.

In a week our youngest child Isaiah, is headed to college across the country. There was a time not so long ago when we would have many conversations about the future, education and if college is worth what it costs and what is being taught. Frankly Isaiah has taught us a lot through his questioning and our collective wrestling with these thoughts.

Isaiah cares so deeply about the why of what we do. What is the point and are our hoped outcomes even possible in a world so full of corruption and the tendency for us to fall into the trap of independence over interdependence?

Over the past year he has decided to go the route of college with a very healthy curiosity and amount of doubt while doing so. And yet there is

something drawing him into a collective space of young adults who are grappling with their own Why and what is the point. I pray that he and his peers are willing to keep asking these questions while digging deeper into restoring our sense of interdependence as they learn and teach us.

Isaiah will be driving with his friends to school and we will meet him there. He has finished packing and there is a pile of items ready to go right by the front door. I am in awe of the priority he has put on what should go, what should stay and what should be donated. He has plenty of room for those who will travel with him on this journey and room for more. I have some work to do to do the same.

This week in Vacation Bible School the first lesson we learned was that People are more important than possessions. Then, in order to love one another, we need to love ourselves. And finally, we are not meant to be alone. Family is what we create and while it is hard to always practice compassion, it is always worth it.

David Lamotte's music continues to be a touchstone in my life... I am blessed to call him my friend and with his permission I am sharing one of his songs as a song of reflection for us...

Grace Covenant. I don't know what your why is, where you are feeling the exhaustion of the world or how your body is responding but I do know this...

So like Mary Oliver beacons us - "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" Let's recommit to the practice of faith and call on our lives together...

Video- Song of Peace