

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, July 31, 2022

The Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Festal Eucharist

11 a.m.

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Alison Turner, *Associate for children & Family Ministry and School Chaplain*

on

Luke 12:13-21

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What do we treasure?

When we were in the Choir School library, just the other day the subject of our favorite hymn came up, and with no surprise those Choristers present around the table burst into a song of Praise. Bursting into song, and making a joyful noise unto the Lord (Psalm 100), has certainly been a recurring theme of the Saint Thomas Girl Chorister Course this past week, and it has been a joy to be in the midst of such joyful music making. Thank you all.

This tangible and spontaneous love of hymnody, and indeed of music reminds me of an 80-year-old program that is still popular to this day on tBBC Radio, *Desert Island Discs*. During each episode a question is posed to the interviewee, be it an actor, politician, athlete or explorer and it goes is something like this, *If you could only choose 10 pieces of music to take with you on a desert island, what would they be, and why?* Then typically follows the unfolding of a myriad of stories, and an intriguing treasure trove of associations, as we as listeners go on to eavesdrop on the playing out of their musical memories with wide ranging songs and rhythms that in some cases took root in their souls even from the earliest of years. Many of us here also hold music as treasure in our heart, and perhaps over coffee hour today you can share your own desert island discs, or spotify themes with one another.

Today's Gospel reading poses a number of questions about what we store up, as well as treasure in our lives, *What are our priorities and values, both in terms of the things we own?* and indeed *How do we utilize our time, talent and treasure, individually and communally, to the Glory of God?*

In the weekday masses recently in the readings from Matthew's Gospel we have heard of multiple parables about seeds, pearls and fields to name but a few with each parable in its own way illustrating the values of the kingdom. At other times we have recalled parables of widows, judges and things lost and found, of what it is to be a neighbor, and here today another agricultural theme emerges that is all about a barn.

I can certainly identify with the Barn Builder of today's parable. He is someone who isn't doing anything wrong, or harmful on the face of it. He is a hard worker with an urgent eye for 'barn estate'. Some of you will remember that sense of urgency to store food (and yes, even paper towel), at the

beginning of the lockdown when all the stock in Whole Foods had to be rationed, as shelves swiftly emptied, as people felt the need to grab all they could. There was a sense of desperation and desire for survival in the air, that's for sure. Those images prompted me to recall my grandmother's house. Gran was an astute and resourceful woman, who having experienced great personal trauma, and also rationing during the Second World War in East London would be very swift, even years later to stock her cupboards, at the slightest indication there would be a shortage of simple everyday things. However, as I learned early on this 'barn' was not enough for her. She would take me into the bedroom and pull back a heavy eiderdown to reveal excessive amounts of packs of sugar and tins of corned beef secretively hidden under the bed, just in case. Her fear of running out drove her, motivated her to store, no hoard an abundance of food, just in case.

I suppose that it seems only human nature, or even a basic human need, to want to store or squirrel away things for a rainy day, especially when it comes to having enough food and caring for our families. However, the man we meet in today's Barn Building Parable seems more concerned with a single-handed acquisition of real estate, and so his life it would seem simply passed him by. He is urged on by no other benefit than financial gain, and perhaps the perceived esteem that his new possession appeared to give him, whatever the expense. However, he too was too late to learn the very same saying that my grandmother used to say, whatever you store up or acquire on this earth, the reality remains: *You can't take it with you.*

Time and time again parables cause us to consider what is important in our life. This character is so intent on investing and looking ahead, I wonder do we sometimes spend so much of our time building barns or living simply for our own gain? Are our lives sometimes over cluttered at the expense of spending time and even our talents with those closest to home, let alone those who are neighbors in the widest sense of the word.

What else might we consider from our Barn Builder parable today?

The Office of Institutional Advancement here will be reassured to hear that I definitely do not think this parable is advocating an indifference to investment, or for an abandonment of development plans. Even Joseph's dreams in Genesis, prompted the storing up of barns as years of bumper crops were to lead to years of famine. And yet, this kind of saving up perhaps gives a red flag about inward, rather than outward looking stewardship. The latter is after all biblical and important not only for our own lives, way beyond the church, nationally and even universally. This is particularly with regard to the unequal distribution of global wealth and food that we continue to find documented in Annual World Wealth Reports, which only last year stated 'The top 10 percent of the highest earners in the world now own 76 percent of all wealth.' (July 2021).

I find that it is still shocking to hear that there are still huge barns and warehouses all over the world where surplus food simply sits and wastes away because bureaucracy dictates that it cannot be shared with those who are hungry. A hunger that we witness all around us, in the images of those who scramble in rubbish heaps in Latin America or bins in this city for a morsel to eat, and too the increasing number of people who are food insecure, as neighbors watch on and eat in plenty.

There are clearly policy making bigger barn questions to consider here, but what might we consider for ourselves. What do we stock up on or on hold onto, or refuse to share? Are there things in our lives that really don't we need? Are there choices, attitudes or habits that consume our days, and

that stop us from living a life of love and spending our time, talents and treasure to the Glory of God? What and who do we really treasure?

Now with all this talk about barns, you may think I'm all against keeping or storing anything. However, anyone who has been an elementary teacher knows that not just not possible! We all have our own ways of treasuring and remembering people, places and times.

Just the other day as I was packing up a room for decorating, I came across my own little treasure box, my own mini barn. My parents gave it to me when I left home and it is filled with things which would mean nothing to anybody else. Each thing holds no monetary value, and yet reopening my treasure trove and touching each item reconnected me to memories gathered in my honor, the things stored up for me as a child. The flimsy piece of paper that would be all these years later be a familiar sight, was the mask my father wore when I was born. My baptism announcement in the parish magazine. I too found my RSCM certificate on being admitted to my church choir, at the age of 8, and a flood of musical memories came to the fore of my mind. It really isn't these boxed up things that are important, but the treasured memory that each item evokes, that are both deep and real and joyful, and worth both storing and sharing.

And now as we come to the end of the Saint Thomas Girl Chorister Course, after Evensong today, we pray for all of our Choristers, as you leave us this week: May your experience of being here at Saint Thomas be a treasured memory that is deep, real and joyful and too one that you share, as you continue burst into song and make a joyful noise unto the Lord. (Psalm 100).