

WHAT IS ENOUGH?

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This morning I'm troubled by a question: What is enough? It's actually a rather complex question. It can be broken apart on many levels. Let's phrase it this way... "Do I have enough?" Now fill in the blank implied in the question... Perhaps... "Do I have enough ... money, food, time, clothes, jewelry, children, grandchildren, years in my pension, hats, shoes, etc. etc. etc." And how about love? "Do I have enough love from other people, or for other people?" How about for creation?

How do we define enough?

In our Gospel this morning, a man cries out to Jesus. He calls him teacher, so we know that he is a follower of Jesus. He asks Jesus to get involved in his family's finances! Jesus calls the man friend, so we can assume they know each other. This man is distracted by the question of enough. He wants more and Jesus will not play into this.

We live in a consumer society. It doesn't take long to see this. Advertisements for things such as cars, clothes, or other consumables fill the airwaves. Billboards promoting goods are everywhere.

But Jesus tells us to take care. That life does not consist of things—abundance of things. There is a false sense of security to think this way. Perhaps you remember the old bumper sticker, "The man who dies with the most toys wins?" But really, does he?

There's nothing wrong with wanting nice things. But being greedy and needing to have more than needed is dangerous ground. It looks like our whole society is built upon greed. We are told that eating a particular kind of pizza, using a special shampoo, or driving a certain car will make us happy. But how can that be? Somewhere inside we know the truth that Jesus is speaking about. We don't own our things; our things own us. And as we agreed earlier, we can't take them with us.

The rich farmer in the parable could store up his grain but what good was it really going to do him if he dies that very night? All he would have had was his stuff. And it would all be left behind. What consolation is that?

A story is told that at the funeral of Aristotle Onassis one of the mourners turned to another and asked, "How much did he leave?" and his friend replied, "Everything. He left everything."

If the rich farmer had shared what he had with neighbors and friends, he would have been a truly rich man. He could still have had enough grain for himself, and he also would have had the respect and friendship of everyone around him, and of God.

Our reading from Paul's letter to the Colossians warns us about our behavior. There's a rather long list of don'ts. The point of which I believe is to direct us away from behaviors that are hurtful for our own souls and to guide us to a more righteous way of living. Ultimately, if we are kind in our thinking, speech, and being, we will rid ourselves of the effects of the negative behavior and thus live a happier life. And remember: things will not make us happy. But our happiness comes from inside of ourselves.

Our selection from Colossians ends with the idea that when you let go of all the negative conduct and instead strive to live a life renewed in the knowledge according to our creator, then we are no longer different beings. In Paul's words, "Jew or Greek, slave or free." We are all made in the image of Christ – our God. The same. Our collect for Social Justice which we will pray this morning puts it

this way: “that barriers that divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease, and our divisions being healed we may live in justice and peace.”

So how can we stop storing up treasures here on earth? How can we share what we have and help our neighbors? I heard recently that the earth doesn't have a food shortage. What we have is a distribution issue. There is enough food on our planet to feed every person abundantly. Imagine no food insecurity in our community... No starving children in third world countries... When I was a child, it was starving children in Biafra. I've never understood how my finishing my dinner helped those poor children in Biafra, but the image of their swollen starving bellies has influenced my entire life.

Of course, we must start right here at home in our own community. Look in your pantry. Do you have enough food to feed yourself and your family for the very near future or even longer? Don't take your leftovers and donate, but instead of buying more food for your own shelves maybe donate to the Food Pantry instead.

In Tarrytown, a new initiative was started by the Rotary called the Little Free Pantry. It's a standalone pantry available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for people to take food if they need it and leave food if they can help their neighbor. Volunteers take two-week shifts checking on the pantry. This entails throwing away expired or open food, organizing the shelves, and adding food if needed. This is not a new idea, but it could be something sponsored by Grace in our community. Yes, we do offer a lot at Grace to work on food insecurity, but is it enough?

Remember I started with a question about enough? What is enough? When we're on our death bed—and we all will be one day—will we remember the things we have or the things we did? Will people say with admiration about us when we're gone, “Wow, she had a lot of stuff!” or “Wow, he did so much for XY or Z.”

My prayer for us this morning is that we would think hard about these two words: enough and happy. Ponder our relationship to both this week. And find a way to reconcile ourselves to each.

Amen.