

ThanksLiving – Sermon 4

In this season's sense of Thanksgiving Day and up until next week where we hit All Saints we've been in a time of stewardship and discipleship thinking and we changed that word Thanksgiving that we first encountered by changing the G to an L to ThanksLiving.

Thanksgiving is one thing where you sit back and say thanks but ThanksLiving is what you do with it, and so over the weeks we've been exploring that theme and we talked first in the first week about a ThanksLiving as an attitude. It's a choice it's something we decide to do. You can either live in ThanksLiving or you can live in despair.

ThanksLiving leads into seeing the abundance of what God has given us, the hope that's there and that doesn't really equate to how much stuff we've got. I've seen ThanksLiving amongst the poorest of the poor in the world in little towns in Uganda and Honduras and places like that where the joy of a stick and a tire and a child is ThanksLiving. Then we talk about ThanksLiving as a way, a pilgrimage. Once we change our attitude into one of ThanksLiving instead of one that says all that scarcity we have nothing but we're living into an attitude of ThanksLiving then that's what we do with it; with our relationships with those we meet. Then last week we talked about the most difficult part of ThanksLiving in our sorrow and our suffering which is part of life. How do we hold that? We are holding that with Job, remember. Lost everything and sitting on ashes, his friends not understanding. God comes to him and says, "So what have you created lately Job? Where were you at the beginning when I made all this?" And that's the only answer he gets.

Here today we have the restoration of Job; that in holding that, he comes to open his eyes and open his ears and hear the primal relationship with God in a new way and there he was restored with double what he had before. This makes him a very wealthy man. Step aside Warren Buffett! What he does is generous with his family; in equal shares and the prosperity of living. This isn't about the prosperity gospel that you get sometimes down South and in other parts of the Christian world where you give your heart to Jesus and he'll give you four Mercedes and a Lauren in the driveway. No, it's not that.

This is about restoration; it's a symbol a metaphor and, if you will, it's a fable that tells us about God's love and God's abundant love. It always is enough. We get that also with Bartimaeus. The whole thing here is this blind one who's told to shut up because you're a nobody, you're not whole, you're on the outside. The world sees it as shut up just live your life, stay on the side. He knows that Jesus, the source in the fullness of life, is coming there. He says, "Son of David! Listen to me." I don't know if you have ever had those people that really want to be listened to that have nothing, but you should encounter them at some point because those who really know what they need can be truthful as Bartimaeus was. He holds to it until Jesus says, "Come. What do you want?" And he says, "I want to see again." Again, it's another metaphor. It's not just that he had his eyesight back, but he saw the truth of the fullness of life. He clung to it. He held it. We've seen God in all of those things so far. We've been talking about ThanksLiving as an attitude, a way, a pilgrimage, and ThanksLiving as sorrow and suffering; the fullness of life. Today we turn the corner and we're going to look at ThanksLiving with our stuff.

I was reminded by somebody that maybe I should have brought in the George Carlin routine and shown it to you on the screen. Some of it's probably not quite appropriate for church language, but it's really funny. Talks

about we have so much stuff that we have to build bigger places to hold all our stuff. We have to have so much stuff we need to build bigger houses to hold our stuff. But I want to think about our stuff and we really do have lots of it, don't we? The question I have for you is what's in your closet? Let's just start there. I did this to myself this week as I was thinking about this. I opened my closets and the first thing I realized is that I have a closet that's all my stuff. Well actually not quite because Marlina's stolen a corner at the bottom. But anyway, I have one that's all my stuff primarily, but it's in another room. Marlina has this huge closet. And then we have another closet for all the stuff that doesn't fit in our two closets. And I thought back to my parents, in the house we grew up in, who had like one closet with one single door and all of their stuff was in it. I looked in there and I looked at all the stuff and I thought "Wow I have 12 clergy shirts! and I have 25 other shirts that hang on hangers. And I have 6 pairs of black trousers, because I wear black a lot. I have 2 suits. I have some other dressy sorts of trousers. I've jeans stacked there. I have recreational hiking trousers. I have shorts. I have shoes (will come back to this moment) and I have two Tuxedos." How many of you have two Tuxedos? Well I actually use mine. Both of them were worn in the last week and a half because I use them when I play a play gigs like the G.S.O. Concert, but what do I need two for? And that doesn't even talk about my clergy haberdashery. I was sitting looking in my closet, and these two will attest to it today. I threw on my alb, of which I have 4 or 5, and I opened up the cupboard and looked at all the colourful things that I have: all of the chasubles and ropes and stoles. And I said, "Oh what shall I wear?" And they both laughed at me. Which one? And then my shoes. I have three pairs of shoes that don't go outside. Two are for on stage performing. They're at home. The spare stays here in my office and I change them when I come here so it keeps things neat for stages and inside and daises and wherever you are and serve. And then I have my outside shoes. Then I have in my office also my cemetery shoes. How many of you have a nice pair of cemetery shoes? I'm just looking through all this; not to mention I have 6 sports jackets. How much can I wear at once?

The question is not about how much stuff I have. It's easy to get and a lot of us go out there and we're not feeling good and we buy one more thing. I was looking at the kitchen too, opening cupboards. We have three sets of measuring bowls because everybody does, right? The stainless-steel ones for the stuff that you need stainless steel We also have the porcelain ones, the pottery ones for the ones that you need that. Then we also have the set that's unbreakable for when you're cooking with people you don't trust. How many bowls and sets and measuring things do you need? I can justify everything. But it comes down to this the relationship of stuff to you and you to stuff. If my stuff possesses me, I am in a broken place, a sinful place. If my stuff possesses me, I have moved away from being a steward and a disciple of that stuff, to being owned by it. God blesses us with a great abundance, but we need to always be open to how are we using that. *How are we using this place*, is a constant question I ask. How are we using it not for us, but for others? Because I have so much of that stuff, how does it move, how does it get there, how much stuff do we need in our garages, in our homes? How much do we need to hold onto?

My parents, as we've heard before from others who spoke about who had a remarkable amount of stuff too that meant a great deal to them. We looked at it all when they passed on and went "it means nothing to us." I'm ill that we get attached, but the truth of the matter is to see our things as gifts from God to be used and stewarded. That includes our bank accounts. All the things that we have. Gifts from God, not things that I've done. I don't own my bank account. I don't own my money. I steward it.

I want to give you an example of a couple things about stuff and identity because we wrap up our identity in our stuff too. You don't have tuxedos and you don't have clergy shirts because your identity isn't wound up in it like mine is as a musician or as a priest. But the truth of the matter is there is no uniform for a priest. I don't have to have any clergy shirts, and many clergy I know don't wear them. We tie ourselves up in that.

Many of you know I'm a bass player. I want to tell you a little bit of a story about that because one of the best gifts I ever came into was my bass in high school. We went a long way. We studied and we were professional. We were moving on into that sphere before I got distracted into the church. The bass meant everything to me. She even had a name. She and I are very close. She was 100 years old so I don't have anything against old things, before I ever got her. She and I had a great relationship. It was a symbiotic one. I could not be a bass player without a bass and my bass was my bass. When it came time to go to seminary because I needed the money and I also knew that I probably wouldn't stick with seminary if I still had the choice to slip back into music, I sold my bass to a friend of mine who played in Toronto Symphony. Tim had my bass in the Toronto Symphony. I said "Well, I might never have made the Toronto Symphony, but my bass has." I gave up on that and I went to seminary. People found out I was a bass player and they said, "We could really use you. There's not enough bass players around." I said, "I don't have a bass anymore. You can't be a bass player without a bass. My identity's gone. I'm a musician but I don't play the bass. I don't have one." And they start phoning up to say, "Well that's stupid. We need you and we've got a bass. so now you connect and play." I realized that as a bass player, it wasn't about my bass, it was about the fact I can play any bass. I knew that. But I've broken that relationship and now they would provide basses for me. I played all these gigs in my last couple of years a seminary in England and it was great. So, I found my music life again. But when I came back, I still didn't have a bass until two years after I was ordained and my brother, who was playing in the Toronto Symphony at this point, and Tim decided to sell my bass, and I got it back.

But my relationship with that bass is now different because I realize I am a steward of that bass for a times time. That double bass had a 100-year history before me and probably will have a 100-year history after me. She was even in a rock band for a few years before me and it's done all of this and my identity is not in *the thing*, but it's in how *the thing* is used and how the gift is used and that's the point I'm trying to make. Our identity is not in our stuff, but it's in what we do with it and who we give the glory for that to.

How many of you have heard of the Dukhobors? I grew up with Dukhobors in Saskatchewan. It's more of a western thing and I used to go to Peter Verigin's house. He was one of the founders and cult leaders of the Dukhobor movement, who was out of Eastern Europe and they were sort of a Christian sect. But they had this wonderful practice of every now and then throwing everything into the barn, stripping down their clothes, throwing them in there and burning it all down to know that nothing is theirs and all things come from God. I thought that's kind of fun church. Get everything together and burn it all down. The madness is what they did, but the message is simplicity and dependence upon God is worth listening to.

Also, we get attached to things. Marlina and I when, we moved out from the year we spent in the rectory apartment here, was a locked for her security, because if something were to happen to me there's no equity, no home for her so we live in our own place. That time we realized that we don't have the resources to have to have a vacation home or a cottage somewhere. We had that one on the West Coast. It's beautiful it's still there; my

brother owns, it bought us out. I put the money into a cello for Marlana. We could only afford one thing, so, we found a place that's on conservation area. We have trees out behind us, a nice big conservation area called Alice Creek. Our house is there and for us it was both house and retreat. In the summertime with our pond, and the waterfall there and the fish and all of our garden stuff, and then moving into the forest behind. It's like an escape sitting on the deck.

The city's marked dozens and dozens of trees to come out behind my place because of the Emerald Ash borer. There will now be a 100 to 150-foot-deep swath gone because it's all ash behind where I live, including the 7 trees that I have to take out of my house. This is worth knowing: that that identity for us was hard. We're sad, we don't want to lose those trees but that's also nobody's fault. Emerald Ash borer has come, the trees have to come down, so now Marlana and I are concentrating on what can we do now that they're gone. And we'll plant some trees. We'll do some biodiversity. We might even get permission to plant what the city wants. They want people to come in and plant trees. We'll find out what goes there. We'll never live in the shade of those trees. We'll never see the forest again as it was. So, we're also thinking about wild flowers and butterflies because we've gotten into trying to raise Monarchs in our backyard. We had four this year. That's pretty good. Marlana nurtured them all the way through their stages right from Caterpillar through larva stages to chrysalis to the butterflies that fly away that we'll never see again because it's 3 or 4 generations each way in migration. It's a lot. So, we're already thinking about what can happen in resurrection in this space.

So, I give that to you as about ways of ThanksLiving. We could always live in that sense of "ah we've got all the stuff we need to get bigger locks, we need to get the security system, need to get my smartphone security system, I can turn on the lights, check the temperature, see all my dog's up to, open the front door, forget to lock it for the burglars." What am I worried about? Or we could see our gifts, the things that we've been given, things to steward for a time's time and when things happen that challenge us, like all the trees having to come down, think about well what can be next.

I didn't say this morning at 8:30 because I forgot but one of my favorite examples in all of this was a friend of mine who was the rector of the church on the first hill Capitol Hill going into Seattle and a 6.8 plus earthquake hit he had a stone brick building and theirs was really ravaged so they couldn't worship in it anymore. The very next day he went out and got buttons for all his parishioners and to give a round to the place and it said "the building looks like hell, but the church is OK". The church being the people, their mission continuing forward.

These are the things I want to think about when we're thinking about ThanksLiving. It also has to do with our stuff all of those things that we think we have to have and the more. Our gifts from God to be used. One of the ways I learned this in practical ways was when I did mission trips in Honduras and taught in Uganda and would intentionally take extra suitcases full of new clothes and medications and share that with the people that I was working with; to see the joy of things we just take for granted because we can go down and get it anytime we want. Our stuff should not own us, but we should own our stuff for the service of God and for the mission and ministry that we say is ours.

And I think I've more than made my point so I'll leave it there.