

It started with a call from hospice asking me to visit with a patient in La Posada. He had been incredibly successful in his career, traveled extensively and did some truly amazing things, - but facing his death, he was inconsolable with sorrow and regret... as he explained it, **“I achieved everything I ever wanted in life, but I realize now, it cost me everything that matters most.”** This wasn't the first time I've sat with someone who climbed high the ladder of success, only to discover toward the end, that it had been leaning against the wrong goal all along. **Discerning true value and worth can be a very tricky business.** In this world with so many voices, choices and options, how do we decide what is truly important and really matters? What is the point in life, the true and lasting values and goals that can give a life meaning, purpose and significance? How do we determine if a person's life has been well-lived? In the Luke passage, Jesus has been talking about the Kingdom of God and someone in the crowd interrupts, and asks Jesus to settle a dispute with his brother over their inheritance. But Jesus turns that request into a discussion about greed, possessions and our attitude toward them, with a warning statement and parable,

Luke 12:15-17

“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” Then he (Jesus) told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?'

The workers & fields of a wealthy man have produced a huge windfall, so much so, that he didn't have enough room to store it all. In that peasant culture the whole village was involved in the labor and the village would expect to share in such a plentiful harvest, with everyone in that community celebrating their good fortune and bountiful blessings --- **a rich abundance to be shared by all who worked the land.** But this wealthy land owner didn't share that perspective. Rather than a heartfelt expression of gratitude toward God or appreciation toward those whose hard work produced the harvest, -- **his focus is on self – on satisfying his own desires.** Notice that for him, it's all about 'I and my',

Luke 12:18-19

Then he said, I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'

When Martin Luther King preached a sermon on this text, he pointed out the absolute foolishness and waste, of tearing down his barns to build costlier bigger barns; **when the rich man could have stored that abundance for free**, in the empty stomachs of his neighbors, the starving children who go to bed hungry at night. **This man could have made a difference. He could have been a blessing to others. But he didn't ... and so he wasn't.** Now, it's not that this man is a thief, or directly cheated anyone. He has simply been very successful, and so he makes plans to use his good fortune and excess to retire early, and with this wealth he feels secure to rest and be merry.

Luke 12:20

But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

And why does God call this man, a fool... because he trusted his future, his life and security to things... a fool in pursuit of the trivial, his own pleasure and comfort, rather than the things that actually matter and have lasting meaning in life. "your life is being demanded of you" In the Greek this refers specifically the repayment of a loan. The point is that his life and all that it contains are really just on loan, and belong to his Creator, to God ... who that very night, demanded repayment in full. All through Scripture we are reminded, that our lives, our bodies, and all that we will ever have are all a gift freely given by God, and when our days are done, **we'll leave it all behind...** and we won't need any pockets in the clothes we're buried in. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be? He thinks storing more stuff will make him more secure-- -- **but God calls this man, a fool.** He chose to build bigger barns rather than **build a bigger and more meaningful life...** and like the man I sat with at hospice, it ends in hopeless despair and agonizing grief. **You and I**, we have this one fairly short mortal life-time to live, in which to prepare for eternal life in the Kingdom of God. The point and purpose of our lives is not to build bigger barns for accumulating & storing more stuff, **but to grow in grace and faith in response to God's love.**

This parable is primarily about our attitudes toward money and wealth, but the message and point goes much deeper, and **applies to every aspect of our lives including the grace of God which we receive in abundance, not to hoard or store away in bigger barns, but to share and reflect back out into the world.** And in the same way, this church does not really belong to us, but was given to us for mission by those who preceded us, as others will build mission on whatever we pass along. Jesus is teaching about having a “Kingdom of God perspective” based on responding in trust and faithfulness to the gracious blessings and abundance of the Lord ... **all in contrast to fearful anxiety driven by the “lie of scarcity” that leads to greed and the endless accumulation of possessions.** The Exodus 5 passage highlights these two distinct and opposing world-views and perspectives... for the fear of scarcity was the lie that drove Pharaohs greed, that make him anxious, afraid there wouldn't be enough bricks, if the people were allowed to break from production, and to worship and celebrate God and God's blessings.

Exodus 5:4-9

But the king of Egypt said ... why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!" Pharaoh continued, "... no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But require the same quantity of bricks **for they are lazy; that is why they cry, 'Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.'** Let heavier work be laid on them; then they will labor at it and pay no attention to deceptive words."

By Pharaoh's reckoning, the people had value only as objects useful for production. He wanted their endless labor to break their spirits, and cause them to forget they were loved and precious to God.

Exodus 5:13, 17

Pharaoh said, "You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' Go now, and work..."

Pharaoh is ruled by greed fueled by his fear of scarcity, which demands, ever more work and endless production.

~Under Pharaoh, slaves never had a day off or down time for rest, but always endless work and always we need more bricks.

~Under Pharaoh's system, you are worth only as much as you produce, and your value is determined by your accomplishment & success.

In Pharaoh's world of fear and exploitation, scarcity and greed, and no amount of brick production is ever going to be enough, and so the required quota of bricks will always increase. **Enough will always be just a little more than however much I have.** The Pharaohs of this world are like a **self-destructive-narcotic** that will never be satisfied or pleased by our work and effort but always disappointed that we couldn't accomplish more, and that even our best efforts are never good enough. But honestly, my struggle has never really been with my employers **but that I am my own demanding and dissatisfied Pharaoh...** maybe because I haven't quite accepted God's free & healing grace, I'll drive myself relentlessly like Pharaoh's fear of scarcity. Friends, that fear of scarcity results in greed and hoarding, **and that is not how our loving Lord intends for us to live.** We live surrounded by the untruth of Pharaoh's fear of scarcity, which is a very powerful and pervasive debilitating force. **But learning to trust in God, and in God's promise to provide breaks the enslaving bondage of this world's Pharaohs & fear.** In contrast to Pharaoh's way of fear, exploitation, scarcity & greed consider this story about God's abundance in feeding the 5000 when Jesus instructs the disciples to feed the crowd listening to him in the desert.

Matthew 15:33

The disciples said to Jesus, "Where are we to get enough bread in the desert to feed so great a crowd?" **Do you hear the echo of Pharaoh's fear, & assumption of scarcity?**

Well, as it turns out that there was way more than enough for all. From just a little bread and the few fish of a boy's lunch, the whole crowd was fed everyone all that they wanted to eat, even gathering baskets of excess, **a sign of God's abundance.** God's grace is a gift that counteracts Pharaoh's fear of scarcity. With Sabbath, so we stop our busy production and accomplishing in order to simply be present with God in faith and in trust. In the parable, Jesus calls us to forsake our idolatry of possessions, because our stuff will never really make us more secure, but actually greed and fear of scarcity can work against our walk and spiritual development. The Pharaohs of this world constantly and fearfully tell us, we must make more bricks, we must build and fill bigger barns. But in God's grace, in contrast to Pharaoh's incessant demands, we can stop our busy production and accomplishing in order to simply be present with God in faith & in trust. We are called to reclaim God's truth, promise and purpose, rather than trying to satisfy our Pharaoh's with yet more bricks, or building a bigger barn to store excess beyond our needs. Our call is to more fully embrace, to experience delight and joy, and to celebrate God's great power and presence in our world;... because God loves us truly, not just for what we do, but simply because we are... for we work in order to live, and it's only Pharaoh's slaves who live in order to work. So let us reclaim God's truth and purpose against Pharaoh's fear of scarcity and stop making bricks long enough to listen & attend to God... and break our need to be always busy and productive. Let us make more time and space for relationships and reflection, rather than all the other stuff that we cram into our lives. So **do we** find ourselves hoarding our possessions and wanting more, as if this life and our accumulated stuff were all there is?

The question is, **"What makes human life worthwhile?", is it God's gracious love or human accomplishment? Who and what are the Pharaoh's who drive us to make more bricks?, who and what is it that demands our endless productivity?, And am I living this life God gave me in the best possible way?** Jesus doesn't call us to acquire more stuff, or to build and fill bigger barns, but Jesus did say in

John 10:10

I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly.

Our goal is that when we look back over the life we lived, the truths and values by which we lived, we can say: **No regrets, I walked with God along the journey given me, I enjoyed, I learned, I grew and I made a difference.**