

I love peaches, and this week, I've been eating peaches. Fabulous peaches. They weren't ripe immediately, but it didn't take long for them to soften up into crisp, juicy, sweet bites of delicious, summer joy. What I've loved most about these peaches are the sound they make when you tear a section from the pit...Mm!).

But I had a problem - I had too many of them and they all turned ripe at the same time. What do you do with an abundance of peaches that need to be eaten and enjoyed immediately? Should I freeze'em? Make a peach salad for dinner? Bake a peach pie, or a cobbler?

I was sitting there at my dining room table with a beautiful peach, quartered up in front of me, thinking "These peaches are going to go bad," But suddenly, I had a great idea. Still in my pajamas, I grabbed some of those peaches and ran out the door. My neighbor Ray was just pulling out of his driveway, but he stopped and rolled his window down. Holding the peaches, I told him I'd put them in his kitchen. He was thrilled. I didn't realize the connection with our gospel today until I was walking back into the house.

Jesus tells a story about abundance in our gospel lesson, but it doesn't start there. A man asks him to speak up on his behalf - "tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." The man is probably feeling cheated, entitled to his fair share of what was left. I might have expected Jesus to reply with words about fairness, equity and justice. But Jesus responds with a warning - "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed." And then he says this, "one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." And he tells this parable.

The land of a rich man produced abundantly. To store it, he tears down his barns and builds bigger ones where he could store all his crops and goods. Then to his Soul he says, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years - you have enough! You don't need to work anymore: Enjoy!" But God says to him "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And all that you have, whose will they be?" "So it is," Jesus says, "with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

What does it mean to be “rich toward God”? Does it mean racing out the door with perfectly ripe peaches in hand to give to your neighbor? Perhaps. But more than that, I wonder if it’s first seeing your abundance. And more than that, could it also be knowing that all abundance, all that is abundant, is simply a sign of what is truly abundant - the gift of grace we have and know in God. Jesus points to this when he says, not “a rich man produced abundantly” but “The land of a rich man produced abundantly.” Truly, farmers have a sense of God’s gracious abundance better than many.

But in the face of that abundant gift of God, what is our response to be? Do we seek to guard and protect it, treat it as precious, important to defend? Do we treat it as abundant or do we seek to store it up around us for fear that we might not actually have enough? That it might not be so easily earned in the future.

No, the thing about the gift of abundance, whether in peaches or the grace of God we have in Christ, is that it doesn’t feel like abundance unless you treat it as abundance. And what does that mean but to share it. By storing it up, we treat it as finite (as though it might run out). And if God’s grace runs out, how do we divide up or even decide who gets what God’s already given. Storing it up makes our love, generosity and welcome a little more guarded and careful, even scarce - a little less like the love, generosity and welcome of Jesus. But in sharing it, in treating it as abundant in God, the barn doors are swung open and we find that it pours out beyond even the ways we tried to store it. In sharing that abundant grace of God abundantly, rather than running out, the supply grows.

Behind this parable though is a question about what we'll leave behind when we're gone. For these words from Jesus, our reading from Ecclesiastes and Psalm 49 all remind us that life is fleeting and all too short. After all, a man seeking his inheritance begins this gospel story. And it is a question on many of our minds: For what will we use the time we are given, what indeed can we leave behind?

These few weeks, the abundance of this place has been made known. These interview style sermons have shown us the riches and abundance of individual members who have shared their faith with us. And the abundance we've found here, in this community and this precious building over all these years, has spilled out beyond these walls. So here we are selling this barn and raising a new one to store it in. Once the new church is built though, the temptation to relax, eat, drink and be merry will be powerful. We will certainly take time for such things - to celebrate all that God's done - but that is not what this church is or will be about. Indeed, walking through those doors for the first time together, the real work of living beyond it in the vast abundance of God will begin.

Opening those doors and participating in the giving and spreading of God's great gift of grace to all the world will be our task, just as it's been our task in this building. The difference will be that there is a brand new shiny "barn" to get in our way. But Jesus will be standing at the door, welcoming us in, reminding us that each of our lives, our life in God, is demanded of us. The demands of this world, its measures of success, are loud in our ears - but God demands our very lives. When the day comes that this life is over, will it be a building we leave behind, or a community of faith we helped to build. Will we give up our life in the light of the outpouring of God's grace that we have known, out of the gift of abundance that seeks to pour forth beyond all boundaries, borders and walls? As it has been, so shall it be - a sweet business, indeed.

AMEN