

# ***We Are Not Alone***

“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” In today’s Gospel reading, we see someone who is concerned about his own welfare only. His request could be fair, but in the eyes of Jesus, the man is too concerned about his own welfare. He doesn’t ask how he can share with others; he only asks about increasing his share of possessions. His insecurity and sense of entitlement lead him to be greedy. So, Jesus said, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

The following parable helps us to understand how *not* to live an abundant life. The land of a rich man is so fertile he runs out of storage space for his harvested crops. So, he is planning to pull down his barns to build larger ones, with more than enough space for all his grain, all his goods. And he says to himself, ‘I have stored up enough good things to last for years to come; I will relax, eat, drink and enjoy myself.’ This man thinks that all his possessions make him invulnerable; he will feed his own hunger, he will quench his own thirst. But God says to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’

It’s so easy to imagine that life – in some ways, that life is held up for us as an example of what we should all aspire to – work hard, make money, buy more stuff. There’s even a bumper sticker – “He who dies with the most toys, wins”. But what does the man in the parable win? He is rich but his soul is poor; he anticipates future wealth, but doesn’t enjoy the life he has now, at this moment. This story reminds us that abundant life doesn’t mean having more physical

possessions – the abundance is spiritual, sharing and giving in relationship with each other and with God. If that rich man was in such a relationship, he could have cultivated friendships as he cultivated his crops. If he chose to give away some of his harvest, he could have been rich in relationships with others; but he chose to hoard his wealth, and, in so doing, died alone.

A New Creed of the United Church starts with four words: “We are not alone”. Those four words have two meanings. Firstly, ‘God is with us’. We cannot be separated from God, because we are created to be in relationship with God. Secondly, ‘we live with others’ and ‘we are interdependent’. God created us to take care of each other. So, when we say that ‘we are not alone’, we know that we belong to God’s world, and we also know that we are all responsible for each other.

However, it is not easy for us to believe that ‘we are not alone’. Because we just simply forget it; sometimes we don’t even remember what we were thinking or saying even a minute ago. And also because we encounter people who live as if they live alone in the world; we not only live with those who are caring, but also those who are careless. We feel God’s presence and we feel God’s absence in a day. We feel connected to people and we feel disconnected to people in an hour. How can we keep ourselves from losing our belief?

When Israel rejected God’s love, and kept forgetting God’s presence, God reminded them of the days when they were vulnerable. In Hosea 11:1-4, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me...Yet I was the one who taught Israel to walk. I took my people up in my arms, but they did not acknowledge that I took care of

them. I drew them to me with affection and love. I picked them up and held them to my cheek; I bent down to them and fed them.”

It’s like seeing old pictures. A mother says to her grown-up child, “Oh, look at that cute baby picture! Do you know how adorable you were? You are still the apple of my eye.” None of us grew up by ourselves. It is easy to forget how utterly dependent we were when we were children; how much we needed, how much was given to us. It’s good for us to remember our own childhood, the days when we were so vulnerable, but surrounded by love.

Once a month, we have a church service at the Lodge on 4<sup>th</sup>, and last Thursday was my first day to do a service there. I was thinking that it could be a challenge for me to communicate with them, not only because of their difficulty in listening, but also because of my difficulty in speaking English. But I was wrong. Their hearts were so open that I could communicate with them. The people there were caring, welcoming and so present to me. And I realized it is our vulnerabilities that make us feel deeply connected to each other. Think about your own vulnerability as a reminder that we are dependent on one another; we need God and we need each other; we are not alone. Thanks be to God.