

R U talking to me? July 31, 2022 Hosea 11:1-4 and Luke 12:13-21

This week in our *Listening to the Gospel* group all of us were lively in our reactions to the Gospel. Each of us had stories to tell about how much or how little “stuff” we had and didn’t know what to do with.

We all knew someone who is holding on tight for dear life and others of us who readily share the wealth, including one person we heard about who purchased a cow for his own use after not having milk in his youth and then gave milk away free to anyone in need! We also talked about houses that were knocked down to build something larger, often to the detriment of folks of lesser means.

If the Gospels are intended to draw in people and give us a talking to, this one did its job well. We all felt like asking Luke or Jesus or God “Are you talking to me?”

In the Gospel story Jesus says to the brother who was worried about an inheritance “Are you talking to me? Who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” Within the story is a parable where the rich man instructs his soul “Soul, are you talking to me? You have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”

I don’t know how this story was heard back in the days of Luke, or when Jesus was teaching in person. How many people coming to Jesus for guidance were receiving an inheritance? How many could relate to having an abundance of goods? I envision that hungry and poor and disinherited people were eager to hear his words while the few, what we might call, the 1%, were hesitating to knock on Jesus’ door for advice on how to make their riches last longer.

And yet, whether we have a lot or a little. Whether we are the younger or the older brother. Whether we are talking to Jesus or to our souls about what is important to us, this Gospel story asks something almost universal. As a poet (Mary Oliver) once asked “What is it you plan to do with your one, wild and precious life?”

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean—
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

The poet's question, "Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?" is at the heart of this Gospel. "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you." Our lives, the greatest gift of all, have an expiration date. Wild and precious as we are, we do not live forever. Our stuff also has an expiration date. Odd as it seems, what does not have a "don't use past this date" is what we pass along while we are alive.

The legacy that we give out before we die, lives on in others. Soul, you have ample goods. So why not seed the world with blessings right now? Why not seed the world with your attention? Why not fall down now while you can, and be rich toward God?

Yes, God says, "Whoever and wherever you are in your life, I am talking to you."

No wonder on hearing this Gospel in our little Tuesday morning prayer group we all became, like Ephraim in our Old Testament reading today, a child standing before God hoping to receive blessing, not a word of condemnation.

Hoping to hear "Yet it was I who taught Ephraim (insert your own name here) to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them."

O! If only both brothers with the family goods could have heard that proclamation! Would they have been less concerned about what share of the family inheritance they was getting? Would they have known how well they were loved?

Here then is the connection between the ancient Prophet Hosea's teachings to the Jewish people and Luke's teaching to the people of his time, and us.

The cords of human kindness, with bands of love, is our birth right. It is what we can give away and still have plenty to go around. It is how we can be rich toward God. Generously giving to others what God has given to us when God bends down to the world and feeds us the Light of Christ. Cup of mercy. Bread of life. Tenderness. Kindness. Bands of love connecting our wild and precious lives together.

Fall down in the grass today friends. Give kindness to someone in need. Stroll through a field of lilies. Lift an infant to your cheek. Stop calculating how much you have or don't have and how much longer you might have to live the way you are living. Thank God for everything that knocks you down a peg so you can be lifted up in time to answer the question. What is it that you plan to do with your life? Amen