

C Lectionary 18 8.4.19

Luke 12:13-21

Focus Statement: Jesus gives us (not me or the singular you) everything we need.

Good morning! I bring you greetings from the forty or so sisters and brother in Christ who are gathered in worship right now at Trinity Lutheran Church in Battle Creek. And I bring greetings from the 300 or so mainly sisters but some brothers in Christ who gather in our building during the week as part of the Woman's Co-op. Since part of the reason I'm here is to thank you for your support of our ministry through our mission partnership, I want to start by telling you a little bit about Trinity and the ministry your gift is helping.

Trinity was founded in 1904 to serve the people of the new neighborhood the Post Cereal factory was building for its employees. In the, what, hundred and fifteen years since, the Post Addition neighborhood has changed a lot. And not, I'll be honest, for the better. Like so many older inner city neighborhoods, Post struggles with aging infrastructure and housing stock. We have some of the highest percentage of rental properties in the city, which means we have a very transient population. Post hasn't bounced back from the 2008 housing crisis; we still have a ton of foreclosed, abandoned and condemned homes. We have one of the highest concentrations of blight. Children in Post have the highest lead concentrations. And with these things tends to come crime, lack of resources, lack of access to services.

But before I paint this place too negatively hear this, I love being a part of the Post neighborhood. Because, yeah, it's a rough neighborhood. But the people who live there are some of the best, hardest working, most dedicated, creative, caring folk you'll ever meet.

For God's Work. Our Hands. Sunday next month, we're organizing a big neighborhood clean-up and block party, and we've got people coming out of the woodwork to support us. Like I mentioned, Trinity, we're small, there's like forty of us. We were thinking a dumpster or two in our parking lot and walking around with trash bags. But we've got over a hundred volunteers partnering on this thing. Post Consumer Foods is renting carnival games, the homeless shelter is going to have their guys come out and grill hot dogs to give away, one of the local charter schools is renting a bounce house, the police are providing sno cones and popcorn, we've got a full-on carnival.

But the coolest ministry we get to be a part of isn't ours, it's the ministry of an organization we are privileged to share our building with. The Woman's Co-op is housed at Trinity and they are what their name sounds like, a cooperative network of women who are working together to help raise themselves and their families out of poverty. Co-op has all the things you'd expect in a social services provider, but what really makes them unique is the network. Members support each other. One of the members who, side note: this woman is a food budgeting wizard. Every member has to take a class with her on how to stretch their food budget. I'm vegetarian, and thanks to her, I know how to make one of those \$5 rotisserie chickens from Meijers stretch across seven healthy and delicious meals. But anyway, she described how Co-op working is that the members on their own don't have what they need, but they all have something to share. So, maybe my kid needs new clothes, and your kid has a bunch of hand-me-downs you're not using. And you need a ride to work. I don't have a car, but my friend Sarah does. And Sarah doesn't have a washing machine at her house, but I do. So I can help with Sarah's laundry, she can drive you to work, and I can

have your hand-me-downs. Everyone shares from their abundance to meet someone else's need. I've seen women come in on a Friday afternoon, desperate for food to get their family through the weekend. A call will go out, the network will rally, and a food basket will be generated. Then, when the network's been totally tapped, another woman will come in who also needs food for the weekend, and the first woman will split her food basket with the second, because she got more than her family really needed for just the weekend, and she wanted to share it with her Co-op sister.

All this got me thinking about the parable we heard this morning, about the rich man and his barns of stuff. The classic read on this parable, which is a good one, is the whole be generous because you can't take it with you idea. You never see a hearse pulling a u-haul. And that's true. "Vanity, vanity, all is vanities," as the writer of Ecclesiastes said. But what really struck me about our pleased as punch farmer was how arrogant and self-absorbed he was. "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops? I know, I will pull down barns and build larger ones, and I store my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, soul" you are awesome. All this my, my, my, he sounds like my best friend's two-year-old, who always wants to "do it self," "do it self." Usually, this command coming right before he just about pulls something over on himself, or puts his shoes on the wrong feet, or falls, or some other catastrophe, because he's two and he's not actually capable of "doing it self" yet. That level of self-confidence isn't even all that cute when you're two, but when you're a full-grown adult, like our farming friend here, it's downright annoying.

And the arrogance to presume that all this grain and these goods were his and his alone, that he'd earned them and didn't have to share them. Come on now. Now, hear me out, farming is hard work. I come from a family of farmers; that is labor. They have to scrimp and save and stretch and push, so I'm not saying that what this guy got didn't take work. But, first off, the parable says "the land of a rich man produced abundantly," so we can sort of assume that someone else was doing the real manual labor for this guy. And, even with that, there is a ton of other people that go into our success. Last week the Gospel reading was about the Lord's Prayer, and in my congregation we talked about how Luther described the prayer for daily bread as including all of the things that went into that bread, things like land to grow the crops, clothes to wear while doing the labor, a home to live in, good weather, good family, a good government, peace, health, decency, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, etc. No matter how hard our rich friend worked, he did not control the weather, provide the infrastructure, invent the tools of farming. There is nothing that we can accomplish completely and totally on our own, everything requires the help, support, input, and ingenuity of another.

And the last thing that strikes me about this guy is how lonely and vulnerable he must have been. Lonely, because yeah, it's nice to have stuff, but how much more fun is it to have people to share it with? Barns full of things can't comfort you when you're feeling sad or help you figure out a problem or laugh at your jokes. And vulnerable because no matter how diligent we are, how careful our saving, how organized our plans, a thing I've learned from the women of Co-op is just how easily the bottom can drop out on us. When that happens, and it happens to all of us at some point, we need a network we can fall back on,

people we can trust, who will love us, support us, share their kid's hand-me-downs, or a ride to work or the doctor, or, the thing we as the church are so famously and importantly known for, that baking dish full of casserole at just the right moment. This guy didn't have that.

And so, the good news for me in this text is that God called him out on it. A bit harshly, but if this guy's anything like me, sometimes I need someone to grab me by the shoulders, give me a big shake, and say, 'you fool,' wake up and see all you have in your life. And in this parable, God does that for this man, and through this parable, Jesus does that for us. Grabs us, shakes us, and says, you're not in this thing alone. Not when everything is going great, and definitely not when things are going bad, this whole thing, this life thing, it's not yours to carry. You are not solely responsible for your own success, but neither are you destined to wrestle through your own struggles. Life is a team sport, Jesus says, and here, I have given you your teammates.

So thank you, on behalf of the members of Trinity Lutheran Church and the Woman's Co-op, for being our teammates in this work of being the people of God. Thanks for reminding us that we're not alone, thanks for believing that the ministry we're about with and for the people of the Post Addition matters, thanks for helping us be the people of God in our neighborhood. As our Presiding Bishop Eaton says, We are church together, for the sake of the world. Thank you for being church with us. And thanks be to God for giving us, one to another. Amen.