

Luke 14 The Irony of Abundance (Part 1)
09.25.05

Frontier House

Three families chosen to be Homesteaders in 1883 out in Montana.

A couple that was engaged.

A Middle Class American family

And an incredibly wealthy family from CA.

They received training and then they would work through the summer and prepare for the winter and the judges would see how might survived.

It was PBS's shot at a reality show.

They learned something from Jerry Bruckheimer and they selected some people that were really hard to like.

The fellow who was really rich stole beds from neighboring houses and when he was caught he said that he was just employing the spirit of the Homesteaders.

He had his family make a gin still that doubled as his bath tub.

In the end, the young couple who was starting was given the best chance to survive.

They said the typical family wouldn't make it through the winter because they argued so much that when they were confined to such small quarters somebody would have been mortally wounded.

When the bed stealing gin maker was told that his family wouldn't have made it through the first couple months because he failed to chop wood, he said he had a secret stash.

But here's the interesting thing.

The children moaned and complained for the first couple of months in Montana, but then they found a way to do work, they never thought they could perform and the men said they had never felt better.

When the kids returned to their life of abundance, they said they were bored because it was so easy.

All they had to do now was shop.

And the dads said they really missed the sense of community.

Isn't it ironic, here are three families sent back in time, robbed of today's abundance?

And many of the participants say that when they returned to today, the time of abundance, they missed the community, the sense of purpose and the meaning of their work and life.

It's not just these families, it happens to the average American family.

We have all of these conveniences and the latest research says that in an average family, a parent spends 10 minutes a day talking with their child, and the average couple spends 15 minutes a day talking with each other.

All of these conveniences but so little time for one another.

When pressed, most families would say they would like to spend more time interacting with each other, but there is so little time. Even with all of these conveniences, there is so little time.

Did you notice the irony in our morning's parable?

Let me read it again, but this time I will read from The Message by Eugene Peterson.

Jesus tells a story about a banquet, code language for Gods' kingdom or heaven, and a king, another code word for God.

Here's what Jesus says:

The Message

Notice the irony?

The first person is too busy for God, too busy for heaven because of his property.

The next is too busy for God because of his work

And the last person is too busy to be a part of God's kingdom because of family commitments.

Do you see the irony?

All of the things that God provides for us to live well; work, family, and abundance, in the parable they prevent us from seeing God, and being a part of God's kingdom.

So what are we to do?

You'll notice that Christ wasn't very big on providing more laws for people to follow.

He taught them with parables and simply said: "Follow me."

But when pressed to provide us direct advice for how to live Jesus was very clear.

He said:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart might and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself."

Do this and you will live *well*.

Here is my question for today:

Think of all of the things that you do in a day, how many of them fall under the rubric of loving the Lord you God with all you heart might and soul, and loving your neighbor as yourself?

I'd like to do something.

Some of you may have wondered what happened to the baptismal font.

Good question.

In it I have placed Ping Pong Balls.

They are meant to represent the many things in our lives.

(Start filing the jug)

Work commitments, the many balls that we keep up in the air.

The emails that we need to return.

The memos, notes, and letters that we should write.

The phone calls that we should return.

The people we should contact.

There are also balls that represent daily life.

Getting to and from work.

Maintaining our car.

Maintaining our house, doing the laundry, getting the gutters repaired.

Vacuuming.

Doing the dishes.

And there are balls that represent our family.

Not just providing for them but spending time together.

Planned trips or visits.

Birthday presents.

Time on the phone.

Caring for their needs.

Helping them through transitions.

Teaching them how to be a good citizen.

All of us have literally hundreds of balls that we keep up in the air.

In many ways they are gifts from God.

They are small signs of the ways that we're needed.

They are all good things.

But here is the problem.

At the end of the day, or on a day like today when we are confronted by this morning's scripture saying the most important thing in life is loving God and neighbor, or on a day like today when we think of how we can spend our time giving to others.

We take the two most important things in life by Jesus' standards, "Loving God and loving neighbor!"

And we try to cram them in.

And this isn't good.

Something's got to give or something's going to break.

Let me suggest another way.

Make room for loving God and others first.
Put the two most important things in your life first.
And then let all of the other balls fill in you life.

You might find you have room for everything.
You might find you're not as interested in some of the
other balls and you just take them out of you life.
You might find you don't have room for some of the
things at home or work.

But here is the payoff.
And this is why Jesus summarizes all of the law in
these two commands.
You'll find that when you make room for God a first
priority
(and this could be in so many different ways.)
Maybe it is honoring the Sabbath and not shopping on
Sunday.
Maybe it is praying with a family member at the end
of the day.
Maybe it is committing to worship every Sunday.
Maybe it is beginning the day with a time of prayer
and Bible study?
Maybe it s participating in a small group and studying
a book together and committing to a mission project.
Maybe it is simply praying before meals.

And when you make room for serving others a first
priority.
Maybe it is making a meal for Southpark Inn.
Working with Foodshare.
Tutoring at HANOC.
Or welcoming people here to worship as a greeter or
usher.
Or teaching in the church school
Being a Stephen minister
Serving on the Social Justice Committee
Or volunteering your talent.

When you make room for loving God with all your
heart might and soul and loving your neighbor as
yourself, and you do this intentionally with resolve,
your life will change.

All of these balls that sometimes feel like random acts
blown around like the ball machine in the lottery will
be connected to a higher purpose.
All of the little things you do will be held in a
different framework.
They will become a part of something bigger.
They will be part of a life of meaning.
A life of purpose.
A life of directed by God.

A life lived not just for your self, but a life lived for others.

A life lived in God's presence with God's help.

You don't have to go back to 1880 to have a meaningful life.

You don't have to throw away your TV, unless you're watching 5 hours a day, and then we need to talk.

You don't need to be a Puritan.

But you do need to place first things first.

Love God, love others, and then attend to the Ping Pong Balls.

Amen