

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Busy: Reconnecting with an Unhurried God

March 31, 2019

Scripture *Luke 12:29-34*

Living Light

I am going to share with you a brief introductory video (It is a preview of a movie but try and let go of that and listen to the message).

<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/minimalismfilm/153518223?autoplay=1>

Many of us live with the tyranny of measuring-up that keeps us weighed down. Lightening the load of expectations and "shoulds" is one way to lighten up as well as to literally lighten the clutter that crowds out our serenity. How do we create space to flourish in the ways God intends? How can we "minimalize" our possessions so that they do not possess us?

A lot of what was shared in commentary for the series in this week I didn't entirely relate to at first but then I started to see more clearly. My experience of living is not that our houses are getting bigger in our region although it is true for many other areas of Canada and the US. I cannot afford what my parents generation could but my life circumstances are very different also. What I can relate to is the pressure to have the right things, or have myself or my children in the right programs. The pressure as a parent to have my 6 year old in every sport imaginable is incredible here in Squamish. I know that in other regions it would be a different pressure but here that is what it is. At Community Christmas Care this year there was a conversation about bike donations and I finally admitted my children don't have the latest bikes in fact Ami didn't even have one her size which was difficult when the bike program hit the school last year. In other communities a kindergartener that didn't bike wouldn't be a big deal but here. Oh the pressure....

I try hard not to get caught up in it and I do a fairly good job at not jumping on the pressure train but if I am honest internally it can be a battle. I rarely have people over because - well. I don't have very fancy stuff and my house is small and kind of old and its messier than I would like and.... That means we miss out on life and community at times. A few years ago I actually gave up worry for lent. It was a very good practice and to be honest I now try to do it every year because as the year continues I fall back into patterns that are not healthy.

I did some practicing of what I am preaching this week. You see it has been Spring Break the last two weeks and it has been very hard to keep up to the work and be the perfect mom and have the children at home. On Saturday morning I decided to get a massage from a neighbour who is trying to get some business. She and her partner are in Squamish for a short time. Both of them have been taking level two ski instructor courses and they have just completed. They offered to

take the girls up on Monday for free. In my mind I had all the reasons I couldn't even though I absolutely love to ski - I thought I'm just too tired and I don't have the time to take a whole day off (even though it was my day off). And then I remembered my last few sermons and off we went up the ski hill for one of the best days ever. Nope my girls likely won't be in ski school or have the latest equipment but we spent a day together loving life and loving each other and that is better than anything we could ever buy. And then I realized I didn't have any childcare for Wednesday and so rather than trying to have us all be home together with me pushing them aside constantly I gave in and we went to the zoo. Of course I was worried about what everyone would think. How come she isn't in the office. How can she take time off now - isn't she going on sabbatical soon.... Don't worry I got all the questions running through my head and yet I realize. We all work way more hours than is healthy, pushing my children away so that I can write a sermon on the important things in life, just doesn't make sense.

When Jesus tells us to strive for kingdom things he isn't telling us to strive for the good things of God in heaven after we die he is encouraging us to live the good life now. Strive to live in the presence of the kingdom here and now. It's not that Jesus is naive and doesn't know how hard life is, it's that he longs for the best for us. It's intriguing to me that the verse following this plea are the beatitudes.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth. the list goes on.

He is saying all those things you worry about when it comes to possessions will not make you happy, will not fulfill you, filling your life with stuff and worry will not bless you.

As I write that I think - we all know that. That is common sense but the reality is we worry so much about setting ourselves up to survive in the future, we spend a lot of energy worrying if we will survive, if we will keep up with our neighbours, we worry about the accumulation of stuff so much that it leads us to more anxiety and depression and we do that whilst most of the world exists on one tenth of what we have. While we accumulate are responsible for climate change. We worry about not having enough and yet we are destroying our world in our accumulation of stuff.

We put ourselves at such a disadvantage with our big consumeristic society. Societies with smaller houses and less stuff are more connected. We have to figure out how to connect with community and one another here in North America. They don't have to do that in the majority of the world. In the Philippines that was one of the first things I noticed. Sure they live in small spaces but their lives spill out onto the streets, they share their lives, every bit of them. There is shared ownership of things, being in community is bigger than self. That is what Jesus is trying to say. Sell your possessions, don't focus on ownership - when you do so you are failing your life

you are limiting what could be - your treasure is found in stuff rather than relationship and that means that is where you heart is.

Earlier in this chapter a rich man is challenged to let go of his wealth and be rich towards God because in doing so your treasure will be so much more. Many people assume that Jesus is advising us to forgo wealth in this life in order to be rewarded more handsomely in the next. Jesus wants us to sell everything and give alms. Perhaps this is some sort of stewardship message. Jesus wants us to cash in our savings accounts and retirement plans in order give more money to God—which presumably means God’s *church*, or the *poor*, or *both*. We may not have an adequate retirement plan *on earth* if we do what he says, but we’ll certainly have a high-class mansion in heaven when we die . . . won’t we?

But that isn’t what Jesus is saying. When Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God or heaven, he is nearly always talking about our experience of heaven in the here and now, not in the hereafter. Right from the beginning of the gospels, Jesus communicates that heaven is NOW, and we’re being asked to change our whole way of thinking. According to Jesus, when we turn our wealth over to God, we not only receive an excellent return on our investment, but we get our investment back in a form that never diminishes and can’t ever be taken from us (like a savings account can). Jesus isn’t advising us to hand over our savings and retirement money for an ultimate retirement nest egg in heaven. In fact, he’s really not talking so much about what we can give to God so much as what God can give *to us*. “Do not be afraid . . . for it is your Father’s good pleasure *to give you the kingdom*.” If God’s kingdom is to be experienced now, in this life, then what is it that we can receive *right now* that no thief—or economic recession—can steal or moth destroy?

Eric Elnes wrote “In college my major was economics. One of the first things you learn in economics is that economics is *not* the study of money like everyone assumes it is. It is the study of *value*. Money is simply a store of value. You cannot eat a dollar bill, but you can trade a few dollars for food. Our dollars do us little good at all until we use them.

To be sure, having a few extra dollars saved up for a rainy day allows us a certain peace of mind. That’s certainly helpful. But peace of mind bears a cost. What is “peace of mind” costing *you*? Ten thousand dollars? A hundred thousand? A million or more? Jesus is suggesting that most of us pay far too much for “peace of mind,” especially when it simply means having a stockpile of cash on hand for a rainy day.

Recently, I traded several hundred dollars I’d been saving in order to travel to our cabin on the Oregon Coast with my family. We could have kept that money and stayed home enjoying the “peace of mind” that saving the money would have allowed us. Or we could have spent it on more practical things, like fall clothing or furniture. But we enjoyed the money a lot more by using it to work on our connection to an “unhurried God” and on our unhurried connection to each other.

The fact of the matter is that love can never be taken away from you, whereas everything else can be. Love can't even be taken away when it exists only in memory, as anyone who has ever lost someone special can attest to. When someone dies, those aspects about our beloved that are less lovable tend to fade into the background, bringing the most loving parts of the relationship to the forefront, making the love we've experienced more concentrated and palpable. ¹

I think about this sort of thing every time we head to the Philippines. It's true that our first two trips to the Philippines were gifts from others almost entirely but this time we are paying our own way and that comes at a cost, but what we will receive in spending time with family, in having our children get to better know their heritage and culture, in seeing Macky thrive as he connects with friends as he shares his homeland with us, that is priceless. I wouldn't ever want to give that up.

"Isn't it curious how we urgently want to accumulate money in order to assure us "peace of mind" in case the bottom drops out in our life, but the quest for "peace of mind" leaves us worried and anxious?"

I'm reminded of a story about a businessman who was standing at the pier of a small coastal Mexican village when a tiny boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the boat were several large yellow fin tuna. The businessman complimented the man on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took to catch them. The man replied, "Only a little while."

The businessman then asked why he didn't stay out longer and catch more fish. The fisherman said he had enough to support his family's immediate needs. The businessman then asked, "But what do you do with the rest of your time?" The fisherman said, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take a siesta with my wife, and stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my amigos. I have a full and busy life, señor."

The businessman scoffed, "I am a Harvard MBA and I could help you. You should spend more time fishing and with the proceeds buy a bigger boat. With the proceeds from the bigger boat you could buy several boats; eventually you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman, you would sell directly to the processor and eventually open your own cannery. You would control the product, processing, and distribution. You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City, then LA and eventually New York City where you would run your expanding enterprise."

The fisherman asked, "But señor, how long will this all take?" To which the businessman replied, "Fifteen to twenty years."

"But what then, señor?"

¹ Elnes, Eric Busy: Restoring Connection to an Unhurried God Part 4: The Pleasure of God (Luke 12:16–21)

The businessman laughed and said, "That's the best part! When the time is right you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich. You would make millions."

"Millions, señor? Then what?"

The businessman responded, "Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take a siesta with your wife, stroll to the village in the evenings where you could sip wine and play your guitar with your amigos."

The fisherman, still smiling, said, "Isn't that what I'm doing right now?"²

What's in *your* wallet—the wallet of your life? What are you accumulating? Are you truly accumulating “peace of mind” for a rainy day or just a whole lot more worry and stress? Are you accumulating the “assurance” you need of some glorious time in the future when you can enjoy the very things that could actually be enjoyed right now? Jesus would advise you spend your money on heaven—on accumulating love, which is our experience of heaven in the here and now. Your investment will be rewarded. It is “God’s good pleasure” to give you the Kingdom. And rumor has it that this is the *only* investment you can take with you beyond this life into the next. You don’t have to have very much to be abundantly blessed if you choose to live in love and gratitude. Don’t give away your experience of heaven in the here and now by worrying about that later life. Live abundantly today.

Amen

² IBID