

Just returning from my summer vacation I can tell you when visiting someplace different or new it is always a helpful thing to make sure you talk to the right person.

Talking to a person who is local or someone is fully familiar with the town or city or area opens up all kinds of doors, they know the best routes, the best restaurants, the best deals, the places and times to avoid etc. etc.

Our Gospel Reading today invites us to be talking to, paying attention to, being best connected to, the right person. We hear an unnamed voice from the crowd address Jesus, “Tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.”

A phrase like this, “Tell my brother!”, especially uttered in a crowd without any introductions or context is usually evidence of sort of conflict, disagreement, upset. “Tell my brother” has a tone of voice all its own whiny, complaining, desperate, urgent, demanding, it’s a phrase that communicates some sense of entitlement.

“Tell my brother...” is the sort of phrase that usually spells trouble. Tell my brother to let me play with his ball or game or toy – trouble! Tell my brother to let me use his Wii or iPad or car – trouble!

Tell my brother to shape up, stop being a jerk, let me start making my own choices – trouble! Tell my brother to allow me to live my own life, to give me what I am owed, to stop holding me down – trouble!

“Tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me..” – trouble, double trouble, triple trouble! “Tell my brother” – trouble! “Money” – double trouble! Family money, family inheritance – triple trouble!

“Tell my brother” could also be: tell my sister, tell my mother, father, husband, wife!

We all know that rather than address this “Tell my brother” statement or invitation to Jesus, rather than attempting to embroil Jesus in this matter he should have been talking, one on one with his brother. The right person to be talking with about this matter was not Jesus but his brother. His brother was the right person, the only person with whom he needed to be talking; only the two brothers together could sort out this matter.

Spurred on by this unexpected attempted interruption Jesus does two things. First of all Jesus enjoins the two brothers to talk and second Jesus shares a parable concerning the need to be talking to the right person, as a guide to exactly what the brothers ought to talk about.

The brief word of guidance that Jesus has for these two brothers, and for all of us who ever find ourselves locked in some dispute over money or goods or property is this: “Take care!” “Be on your guard!” “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” We all know that these are wise, very wise words. These words are both godly wise and worldly wise, because indeed life is never ever about possessions but about justice and fairness; life is never about “stuff”– life is about people and relationships, about who we are with and for and alongside one another. “Take care!” says Jesus. Talk to the right person! Talk to that person, talk to each other in the right way!”

Jesus then goes on to tell a story, to share this parable that we know as the Rich Fool! It is a great parable, short, simple, profound, piercing. There is this farmer, Jesus says, who has been doing well in his practice of agriculture. He has done all the right things to prepare his fields for sowing and planting, he has chosen the right seeds, the best crops to plant; he attends to his fields attentively; he feeds and waters and weeds as the crop grows, he is blessed with the right balance of sun and rain and he has a bumper crop on his hands.

Most of the way through Jesus' parable this rich man, on the face of it, does everything right. On the face of it, he does nothing wrong, he is in the right, when he realizes that he will have no place to store this bumper harvest. On the face of it, he does nothing wrong, he is in the right, when he identifies a plan, to tear down his current barns and replace them with bigger, larger barns where this great harvest will be able to be stored. On the face of it, he does nothing wrong, he is in the right, when he puts this plan into action so he can store the great harvest.

I qualify all these previous statements with "on the face of it" because what is about to happen next, what the farmer is about to do and say next reveals that in fact he has had it all wrong all along. We get to hear exactly what the farmer has been thinking all along, we get to see right inside of him, right into his heart and his innermost motivation as we hear Jesus tell us what he says to himself: And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' All along he has been thinking only about himself, about his ease, about his welfare, about his comfort. All along he has only been concerned for himself. All along it has all been about: "I", "me", "my", "mine"! All along he has been at the center, all along he has only ever thought about himself, all along he has only ever talked to.... himself. Never once did the farmer talk to God, never once did the farmer seek God's guidance, never once did the farmer ask God what could be done with all this bounty, never once did the farmer express thanks to God for the bounty, never once did the farmer consider how he might help others with the greater than expected harvest, never once did the farmer talk with God, until God addressed him, and by then, as it turned out, it was too late!

These congratulations are short-lived because we hear God address the farmer, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.

Talking to the right person would have brought about a whole different ending; talking to the right person would have led to congratulations and celebrations for the farmer and for and from many across the community. Talking to the right person would have seen the wealth shared, multiplied, expanded and extended. Talking to the right person would have ensured that the farmer remembered and paid attention to what he already knew, that in Hebrew culture anyone with a surplus was expected, enjoined, commanded, to share the surplus and to feel deep shame if they didn't share. If possessions exceeded need, possessions were to be shared with the poor, everyone should have known this, this farmer should have known this; everyone had heard this over and over, the farmer had heard this over and over because God had been saying just this ever since the beginning.

As one commentator notes this man had been blessed with a miraculous harvest, God has given him the opportunity to help others in an incredible way but he "mismanages a miracle". Instead of entering into a conversation with God the farmer talks to himself (isn't this one definition of foolishness?!). He

talks to himself only about how he can secure his own future and in this way he disconnects from God, he disconnects from the people around him, he disconnects from the needs of his neighbors, he disconnects from all that the future might hold for him and his community. He talks only to himself, he fails to talk to the right person and so he ends up disconnected from life, the very life that God has for him to live, the very life in which God has blessed him so he can live.

This is a parable about inauthentic existence. The rich man is not a bad man because he is rich; not a fool because he is rich; he is a fool because he is presumptuous. He presumes foolishly that his planning can control a future he does not necessarily have. He is a control freak, except God is in control! Failing to talk to the right person he fails to be a good steward of his abundance; he ends up filling empty barns rather than empty stomachs. Failing to talk to the right person he settles on the wrong notion of what it means to live the good life. Failing to talk to the right person the farmer becomes a hollow man, living as if God did not exist. Failing to talk to the right person, for all practical purposes, he lived as if there was no God, as if God did not matter.

Throughout the coming twelve months here at Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church we intend to focus on CONNECTING: Connecting to God, to one another, to the needs of all our neighbors and to the future. CONNECTING in each and all of these ways begins by talking to the right person – by talking to God, by listening to who God is and what God says, all that God says, by talking with and learning from, by allowing God's views to inspire, imbue, expand and shape our views. Talking with, relating to, CONNECTING to God in this way, will inevitably mean that we need to also be connecting to one another, connecting to the needs of all our neighbors and connecting to the future. Desiring to be CONNECTING to God requires that we be connecting to one another in our church and community; connecting with the needs of all our neighbors around the world and connecting with the future to which God is even now calling us to embrace.

I want to invite and urge all of you to fully embrace the opportunity we have to be CONNECTING in all of these ways. God asks you to look up from and away from your bank statements, your stock portfolio and even from our church budget. God has for us that Living Word that is eternal and is not dependent on market forces. God is speaking and is lead us forward not into bigger, closed barns but into the fullness of abundant life. God is patiently waiting for us to talk to the right person that we might discover all that is truly rich and lasting and of significance. It is in talking to the right person, it is in listening to the right person, it is in centering our living on God, that our CONNECTING will begin and develop and thrive – in Connecting we will find and discover and share the life that God has for each of us to live.

I will contend that throughout this coming year, this year of CONNECTING that Jesus our Lord wants to remind you, and remind and reassure all of us, that your life, that our lives, have meaning and significance, not in what we accumulate but because of the love that God has for us and the love that God has for the world. It is this love that God is even now asking you and us to share in that world – CONNECTING to God; to one another; to the needs of all our neighbors and to the future. OAPC CONNECTING! You, me, all of us CONNECTING! From this Sanctuary, from this Holy Table, from here to everywhere, talking to the right person, CONNECTING! AMEN.