

“Whatever Shall I Build?”

A Communion Meditation offered by W. Dale Osborne

August 1, 2010, Binkley Baptist Church, Lectionary Texts: Hosea 11: 1-11; Luke 12: 13-21

Tuesday morning, 6:30 am July 20, 2010, I arise to embrace a new day and turn on the coffee pot. But when I arise, I am not in my home sweet home, I am in the hallway of Providence Baptist Church in Charleston, SC. The coffee pot is several hundred feet away in the church's kitchen. My fellow Habitat volunteers from Binkley are asleep in several Sunday School rooms of the church. My slumber is banished to the hallway due to a snoring condition I have been blessed with in my adulthood. Soon Kevin Ramer awakes to join me in the quest for coffee. Our third adult chaperone, Angie Sloan, cannot be far behind. We stretch and struggle to shake the sleep from our brains and eyes. Soon a miracle will occur, a miracle which I marvel at every summer on the church Habitat trips. The miracle involves a dozen teenagers rising up at approximately 7:00 am in the middle of their Summer break from school in order to make breakfast and get to the job site by 8:00 am for our first day of Habitat happiness. I love and respect the teenagers of our congregation. They don't attend this mission trip in the hopes of acquiring service learning hours for their various high schools. They carve out a week of their summer in order to sweat, toil and build in the hot sun because they love one another and they love building something that will last. Little do they know that while they are building a home for a single parent household, they are also building relationships that can last a lifetime.

A man in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide with me the property our father left us." Jesus answered him, "Man, who gave me the right to judge or to divide the property between you two?" And he went on to say to them all, "Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because a person's true life is not made up of the things he owns, no matter how rich he may be."

A person's true life is not made up of the things – the things he or she owns.

By the third day on our Habitat job site I had come to know the homeowner Felicia, fairly well. She had worked with us on Tuesday while we painted and dug out a driveway. I think the only place she had not worked was under the house where John, Max, Drew and Steven had done a vent installation project. On Thursday Felicia, a single parent raising three children was helping me with some rock repositioning. Seems like we spent a few hours in the sun moving rock piles from one place on her property to another. As I was about to transport a rather large, and in my mind cumbersome rock, Felicia asked me to stop what I was doing. She wanted me to stop moving the rock and instead give her a chance to inspect it. She looked it over a bit while I held it and then told me it was good enough to go in one of her rock buckets. I obliged her and placed the rock in the bucket. Its size nearly filled the entire bucket. When I asked Felicia why she was selectively setting aside rocks, she told me that her hope was to use them in decorating a rock flower garden which she would eventually create on her homesite. "I don't like to waste things if I can help it she said." Her statement made clear to me some of her life's priorities. She knew what a true life was made of and setting aside the rock had nothing to do with greed. It had everything to do with maintaining perspective while trying to build a life for her family.

Then Jesus told them this parable: "There was once a rich man who had land which bore good crops. He began to think to himself, 'I don't have a place to keep all my crops. What can I do? This is what I will do,' he told himself; 'I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, where I will store the grain and all my other goods. Then I will say to myself, Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself?' " And Jesus concluded, "This is how it is with those who pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in God's sight."

Whatever shall I build?, thought Felicia, I shall build a home for my family and I shall build a rock garden where my children can watch nature unfold in all its creative splendor. Bigger barns were not on her horizon. Building a safe true home were the objects of her true life.

We never got to meet Felicia's three children. This was one of my only regrets of the Habitat trip. They were too young to work out in the hot South Carolina sun on the job site. But we did get a glimpse of their importance to Felicia through her eyes and through her efforts. I could imagine her holding them close to her side as she entered her new home in the future. I could imagine her leaning over to pick them up when they fell and making sure they had food to eat. I could see these loving images as I watched her place their initials in her recently poured concrete driveway. Near her children's initials I watched as she knelt down and lovingly placed her handprints above their initials. Kevin Ramer encouraged her to take on this bold task in her mind. She was somewhat cautious because she did not want to mar the smoothly drying concrete which your Binkley youth had recently poured with care. Her kneeling to provide for her children reminds me today of the passage we read from Hosea. Much like God in the prophecy, Felicia took on loving attributes to care for her children. Remember Hosea's words regarding God, "I was the one who taught Israel to walk. I took my people up in my arms, but they did not acknowledge that I took care of them. I drew them to me with affection and love. I picked them up and held them to my cheek; I bent down to them and fed them."

Felicia's children may give her moments of heartache and concern even though she bends down to meet their needs. This is the stuff of true life and the stuff of true parenting. Whatever shall I build? Whatever shall I build? Think about these words and the words of today's scriptures as you make decisions today and into your future.

Hosea 11: 1-11 (TEV)

The LORD says, "When Israel was a child, I loved him and called him out of Egypt as my son. But the more I called to him, the more he turned away from me. My people sacrificed to Baal; they burned incense to idols. Yet I was the one who taught Israel to walk. I took my people up in my arms, but they did not acknowledge that I took care of them. I drew them to me with affection and love. I picked them up and held them to my cheek; I bent down to them and fed them. "They refuse to return to me, and so they must return to Egypt, and Assyria will rule them. War will sweep through their cities and break down the city gates. It will destroy my people because they do what they themselves think best. They insist on turning away from me. They will cry out because of the yoke that is on them, but no one will lift it from them. "How can I give you up, Israel? How can I abandon you? Could I ever destroy you as I did Admah, or treat you as I did Zeboiim? My heart will not let me do it! My love for you is too strong. I will not punish you in my anger; I will not destroy Israel again. For I am God and not man. I, the Holy One, am with you. I will not come to you in anger. "My people will follow me when I roar like a lion at their enemies. They will hurry to me from the west. They will come from Egypt, as swiftly as birds, and from Assyria, like doves. I will bring them to their homes again. I, the LORD, have spoken."

Luke 12: 13-21 (TEV)

A man in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide with me the property our father left us." Jesus answered him, "Man, who gave me the right to judge or to divide the property between you two?" And he went on to say to them all, "Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because a person's true life is not made up of the things he owns, no matter how rich he may be." Then Jesus told them this parable: "There was once a rich man who had land which bore good crops. He began to think to himself, 'I don't have a place to keep all my crops. What can I do? This is what I will do,' he told himself; 'I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, where I will store the grain and all my other goods. Then I will say to myself, Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself?' " And Jesus concluded, "This is how it is with those who pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in God's sight."