

*“And Jesus said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15).*



For many months now, we've been in prayer and conversation about the future of our ministries here at Incarnate Word. Despite the unknowns of what our mission field might look like coming out of this phase of the Covid pandemic, (*a place no church has ever been*), we ventured out in faith to hire Kairos and Associates to conduct a feasibility study of our passion for mission and our capacity to fund such passion. Just in that act alone, you have said that maintaining the status quo is not enough. You have said that you're willing to imagine new paradigms for manifesting God's presence in our neighborhood. You've said that you believe God still has a future for us here in the city for good.

In his assessment of the feasibility study, Jeff Kjellberg has told us that if we just wish to maintain what we've got, making the necessary structural repairs, there is a willingness in the congregation to fund it. Not much excitement, but a willingness.

If, on the other hand, we are able to capture a bold vision of where we believe God is calling us as a congregation, engaging the neighborhood in new and creative ways, not only is there a willingness to go there, but excitement as well! With excitement comes joy; with joy comes investment and with investment the sky is the limit to where God might lead us.

But here's the rub: According to Jesus in yesterday's gospel reading, if we're doing this with the sole purpose of filling our pews and building "bigger barns," then we're doing this for all the wrong reasons. If we're doing this so that we can keep up with "the Jones'" i.e. our East Avenue neighbors, then we're doing this for all the wrong reasons.

The farmer whom Jesus describes in yesterday's parable is not wrong because he wants bigger barns. He's wrong because he wants them for himself. He has forgotten Israel's call from Genesis, to be "a blessing to all nations." All he can think of is himself. Or as I like to say his life is guided exclusively by the unholy trinity of "Me, Myself, and I."

One of the things I love most about the church is the thing that scares me the most about the church. What I mean is this: The church is one of the only institutions that is dedicated more to the life of the world around it, then to itself.

I want to see our congregation flourish. I want to see our congregation start to think outside the box and to become entrepreneurial in its approach to being a relevant blessing to the neighborhood. I want to see us reconfigure every inch of our building; re-imagine how we and the neighborhood can utilize the sacred space of 597 East Avenue in the best possible way. I want folks in the neighborhood to know who we are and what we do; not to build ourselves up, or stroke my pastoral ego, but to let folks know what we already know: That God is here and God is good!

There may be some who say that in order to all this, we must be rich in possessions. But on this point, I'm going to side with Jesus, who beckons his followers to know that "one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions... but in being rich toward God." (Luke 12). And rich toward God we are!

Peace and Love,  
Pastor Doug