



## August 3 – The Future

At the time of writing this sermon, I am in the middle of preparation for the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Allison and I are both voting members from the Southeastern Iowa Synod and will be gathering with over 800 others from around the ELCA. As I am preparing, I am reading a number of reports around vision and mission, around claiming our voice amid the current issues of today, and also around what the future holds. Each of these categories are filled with joys and fears.

By the time this worship service takes place, we will have a new Bishop-elect for the ELCA. We will have heard reports that give guidance for next steps for the ELCA. Like with many congregations, the ELCA as a whole has seen dramatic decline in the last 16 years. The budget is close to half of what it was in 2009. Membership is down. We have fewer congregations due to departure and closure. Again, we face joys and fears.

These joys and fears are similar to what is faced in this Gospel reading. Those who are approaching Jesus are raising questions about money, finances, and the future. These people were under the thumb of Rome and were nervous about what the future looked like. They were faced with having to do more with less. There was a mindset of scarcity as times got more and more difficult. The question asked is rooted in the fear: will I have enough in the future?

We know these fears well. We may not always want to admit it, but just under the surface, these fears are alive and well. With the ups and downs of the market, comes fears about retirement. With inflation and tariffs, there is worry about how far the paycheck will go. Stores keep having to shutter and close because the business is no longer viable. We face these uncertainties as individuals, as families, and as communities.

It is similar in congregations too. Whether we mean to or not, we bring our worries from out in the world into our life together as a community of faith. Worries arise over what the future will look like. Will we have enough? Much like the ELCA is looking at changes to ensure a future and the vitality of the proclamation of the Gospel, we too face decisions on how best to be a beacon of the love of God in the world, starting at 52<sup>nd</sup> and Urbandale Ave.

Jesus reminds the crowd that whatever we do, it needs to be centered in the present, and in God's love. None of us is guaranteed tomorrow. All we have is today. What can we do right now to proclaim the love of God into a hurting world. Jesus desires to flip the question. In a world that is focused on tangible riches, what does it look like to be rich toward God? What does it look like to live in that way?

From past experiences at Churchwide assembly, I know that it will be a fruitful time together. There will be some reports that are disheartening. Other reports will be uplifting. The one thing central to all that takes place is worship. We find our center as we gather in worship. We meet God in these experiences and are energized by the Spirit. I am looking forward to witnessing Allison experience such a beautiful display of faithfulness as we gather in worship and dwell in the Word. I am thankful for the opportunity to be reminded that God is far bigger than my fears, or even the fears of the ELCA.

A bishop with whom I am working on a churchwide committee raised this question when looking at this text: Is giving driven by mission, or is mission limited by giving? What do you think? I would really love to hear from you. How are we doing? Are we living a missional life, rich toward God? Or are we limited in our mission because of our mindset? That sums up this text. I would love to hear your response to the question.

I pray that we can find ways to be open and honest about our joys and fears, that we can find our center in worship, be held in God's grace, strengthened in love, and sent forth in mission, being a beacon of God's love in the world around us. Amen.

Pastor Michael Schmidt