

*Since you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above,
where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (Colossians 3:1)*

It was not my proudest moment,
but a few years ago when we were trying to sell our old house in North Branford
to move up here, we rented a Pod –
you know, one of those mobile storage units,
sort of like a portable room.
It was at the suggestion of the realtor “staging” our house.
I guess I was both afraid that we wouldn't sell the old house
and afraid to get rid of stuff we might need in the new house.
So out of this fear we ended up renting a Pod for a couple hundred bucks a month.

About a year later, when we finally settled in our new home,
we had the Pod delivered to our driveway.
Imagine my excitement as I slipped the key into the padlock.
Why, it was like opening the world's biggest and best-ever birthday gift, right?

WRONG.

My heart sank as I walked in that blasted box.
With the exception of a couple stacks of books,
there was nothing in there I actually wanted.
We ended up having a charity come and take it all away right out of the Pod.
Yeah, I was a fool to have rented that thing.
Just think what else I could've done with all that time and money and energy.
But my fears and anxieties got in the way.

But enough about me.
I don't want to make the same mistake as the guy in today's parable
who talks incessantly about and to himself.

Jesus tells this parable as he's still on the way to Jerusalem where he will give of himself
for us and for all creation.
At first it seems to be a caution against too many possessions.
It's true, Jesus does talk a lot about money and the imperative to share with those in need,
especially in Luke's Gospel.
He does warn against storing up treasures for ourselves and not being rich in God,
as in today's gospel.

But I think this story might be more about *whatever* it is
that keeps us from the love of God and neighbor,
whatever tricks us into thinking that we don't *need* God and our neighbor.

See what you think...

There's a guy who has so much stuff, such an abundance of crops, that he doesn't know what to do with it all.

Just listen how he approaches this dilemma.

"He thought to *himself*, 'What should *I* do, for *I* have no place to store *my* crops?' ...

'*I* will do this. *I* will pull down *my* barns and build larger ones, and

I will store all *my* grain and *my* goods.

And *I* will say to *my* soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'"

Now let's be clear.

I don't think the point is that stuff per se is all bad.

Or that it's bad to plan ahead.

And I certainly hope it's not that relaxing, eating, drinking and being merry is all bad!

But did you hear *how* that guy made his decision?

Did you hear all the *I*, *I*, *I* and *my*, *my*, *my* in that short passage?

It's all about him, him, him!

He even talks to himself, to his soul, as if he's his own favorite person.

This guy thinks he lives in a universe of one.

And, sadly, he does appear to die alone with no one to leave his plentiful possessions.

Think back at his internal dialogue.

Did he even have anyone else to consult? Or was he too caught up in himself?

Did he consider sharing his stuff with those who need it?

Did he appreciate all the factors that went into his good fortune –

Seasonable weather? Workers? The land itself?

Did it dawn on him to thank God for his many gifts?

No, it's all and only about *him*.

No wonder God in the story calls him a fool.

No wonder Jesus tells this parable.

Because at its heart it's the same message as in most everything Jesus says and does:

the importance of community,

of reaching out to others, breaking down barriers,

insisting there are no outcasts.

This has come up week by week this summer

in all these stories as Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem, according to Luke's Gospel.

Never once does Jesus lose sight of the people around him along the way.

Never does he fail to see God and the God-given potential in each of the people,

whoever, whatever, they may be.

But the guy in the parable does and, frankly, sometimes so do we.

And when we fall into this trap we're susceptible to so many others – not the least of which is the trap of fear.*

We begin to fear the other
when we convince ourselves that we're utterly independent,
a so-called "self-made" man or woman
(instead of who we really are – *made in the image of God.*)
We begin to fear the other
when we convince ourselves that those who happen to look or
love or believe differently than us
are fundamentally different from us
(instead of who we really are – *all children of God.*)

One of my favorite Biblical writers, David Lose, wrote this week that "there is, right now, a profound...message out and about that we should not and cannot trust each other, that the world is increasingly dangerous and we should therefore be increasingly afraid. That kind of fear will not lead us forward... The Bible warns us against fear..."

Remember, what's the first thing angels almost always say? *Fear not.*

So, yes, the Bible does warn us against fear.
Because it's really hard to reach out to our neighbor and
create community when we're afraid.
It's really hard to recognize God in our neighbor – or ourselves,
when we're afraid.
And, God help us, it's nearly impossible to make good, loving decisions when we're afraid.

It's almost enough to make you pity that foolish guy in the parable, isn't it?
In fact, with my foolish history with that Pod, I do.
After all, he was right about one thing:
We as Christians are all about building.
But instead of building walls to cower in fear,
and barns to hold things in for ourselves,
Jesus shows that we build relationships – bridges – *out*
to serve the world that God so loves.

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[* This transition to the theme of "fear" was suggested in a sermon by the Rev. Cardelia Howell-Diamond and used with her gracious knowledge.]

