

This morning, at the beginning of the month, millions of American must choose between paying their rent and putting food on the table.

Some of them must also choose between paying their light and water bills and putting food on the table.

Many Americans can't put gas in their car and ration their medications because they need to put food on the table.

They work multiple low paying jobs, go into credit card debt, and worry about how they will pay for child care – all because they struggle to put food on the table.

In the United States, approximately 46 million people rely on the assistance of food pantries and food banks to feed themselves and their families. Even here in the Concord area – affluent, well-off, seemingly not-in-need – 7,000 pounds food is distributed and 250 meals are provided each week by Open Table to people in need, coming from all over the metro-west and suburban Boston area. Local businesses supply groceries, meals, even flowers; and volunteers from community organizations, churches, and schools run the operation. Many of you are already familiar with Open Table because part of your weekly offering here at Chapel goes to support its cause, and because of the remarkable turnout at last year's "Empty Bowl" event here at Newbury Court, which raised thousands of dollars to feed our hungry neighbors.

And now, there's a movement abreast in local communities here in the Boston area – and around the country – that re-imagines the services of a food pantry on a somewhat smaller scale, with the same big results. They are called "Micro Food Pantries." While they look like the Little Free Libraries you'll find scattered all over Greater Boston, a Micro Food Pantry is filled with nonperishable food items provided by members of the community for other members of the community. The invitation is simple and clear: if you are in need of food, help yourself any day, any time; and, if you're in a position to help, your non-expired, non-perishable food can go right into the box. More often than not, the items put in the pantry are picked up within the next 24 hours, and then the shelves are stocked full again before too long.

It's sort of magical – miraculous even – to think about the impact these simple micro food pantries have on the neighborhoods they serve – and on today of all days, on a morning when we hear Jesus tell us a story about a man whose answer to having so much is to build a bigger barn.

It's easy to laugh at and cast judgment on the man in Jesus' parable, commonly known as the "rich fool." Jesus tells us that this man's farm has yielded an over-abundance of fine crops and has so much that he doesn't know what to do with it. So, he hatches a plan to tear down and rebuild barns that are big enough to store every ounce of this wheat and his other goods, so that he will be set for years to come, so that he can "rest, eat, drink, and be merry" for the rest of his life. Pfft, what an idiot.

Except, when you get right down to it, his plan doesn't seem idiotic or foolish at all. It makes complete and total sense. He's had an unexpectedly fruitful year and, wisely, wants to protect his assets so that he can live comfortably into the future. I mean, isn't this something you've done and generations after you continue to do? When did acting responsibly with your wealth become something to scoff at?

If we go back to the first few verses of today's reading I think the message hidden in Jesus' parable is revealed more clearly.

Remember that the passage begins with a man in the crowd who yells out to Jesus, “Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father’s estate with me!” As it is today, at the time of Jesus’ ministry, there were certain rules and regulations about how an inheritance was to be divided among a deceased person’s loved ones. Jesus, a Rabbi, was someone people would reasonably go to for resolution on these kinds of issues.

But, oddly, Jesus responds by saying, “who made me judge over things like that?” And then, with no reference to or mention of “fairness,” Jesus addresses the issue of possessions. “Life is not measured by how much you own,” he says.

Jesus warns the man in the crowd, by way of parable, that it is so easy, so frighteningly easily, to choose to live in a world of one. For Jesus, the man’s self-interested demand for an inheritance signals a break in community, and in society’s primary community – family. This is heartbreaking for Jesus, because as he teaches and demonstrates over and over again, it is in and through community that we experience life with God.

And so, he tells this parable which “digs deeper, toward the heart.” It tells about how easily our values can be rewired, how ordinary and hard-working people can end up existing in their own self-absorbed universes, how we so effortlessly buy into the illusion of independence – from others, from need, even from God. For the farmer, the problem isn’t his good fortune – it’s how his “vision has been curved to see that everything starts and ends with himself.”

And to me, this – this – is what’s so challenging about what Jesus is teaching the crowd, this man, and us here in this passage from Luke. None of us – not even the “wealthiest” of us – can go it alone and live the Kingdom life that Jesus describes.

When we think, “If I just had (BLANK), everything would be ok, ” we’re in trouble. Yes, there are worthy things that we work hard for and dream about - an education, a steady income, a nice vacation, a good reputation, comfort and good health in elderhood. But, Jesus’ point is that none of these things promise us that we can “transcend our vulnerabilities, our mortality; ultimately, none of these things will keep us from being dependent on others and, most especially, on God.”

Building a bigger barn will not, in the end, guard and protect your life, my life, or our collective life. Jesus teaches that the more we, as individuals and as a society, treat self-interest as an idol, we will not live abundantly. The more we “store away” and keep our treasures to ourselves, the more we separate from the community that needs us, and that we need.

For those of you who are here this morning and feel empty, the promise of this community is that there are people here who will fill you up. For those of you who are here and feel like you’re overwhelmed with abundance, the promise of this community is that there are people here who need you.

It’s by the provision of God’s community that all of us are fed and hunger no more. Amen.