

July 31, 2022

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:13-21

Soul Investment

Then (Jesus) told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there 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.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So, it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Luke 12:16-21 NRSV

This parable reminds us that it is human nature to plan and build newer and larger structures in abundant times. This parable ends with the advice to give to God rather than to the glory and false security for the self. How do we give to God? Many other places in scripture act as reminders that the surest way to give to God is to give to those who have need here and now.

For some congregations, their structures enhance and support their giving to others. For others, the building itself - its care and maintenance - has become their ministry. Prayerful discernment about the role of the building in congregational life can be energizing and lead to new vision and purpose.

During the first half of 2022, the national staff of the United Church of Christ moved from the space that had been home for more than thirty years into new office space. Over the years, the national staff has continued to be reduced. With COVID on the scene, many of the staff began to work from home. The combination of a smaller staff and a greater percentage of those working from home meant that that large space of the old offices was no longer needed. After a period of discernment, it was decided that that building was no longer serving its purpose - to serve the mission and ministry of the church. So, the staff moved their official offices a mile away. The new space at 1300 E. 9th Street in Cleveland, is smaller and more flexible, with an open floor plan that encourages collaboration and innovation.

It will not be the right decision for every church to sell its building and move to smaller quarters. However, every church with a physical plant can ask whether the congregation is serving the building and grounds more than the building and grounds are serving God and neighbor.