

Sermon: Unforeseen Opportunity Cost
Scripture Readings: Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14
Christian Ko Choi
Westminster Presbyterian Church
Springfield, Illinois

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Today's first Scripture reading comes from Hebrews, Chapter 13, verses one through eight followed by verses 15 and 16. As we prepare to hear the last chapter of Hebrews, the author is encouraging and reminding all of us to be steadfast in our faith and in loving others. Hear the Word of the Lord.

¹Let mutual love continue. ²Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. ⁴Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. ⁵Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for God has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." ⁶So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?"

⁷Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

¹⁵Through Jesus, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Gospel Luke 14:1, 7-14

Our Gospel reading for today comes from Luke chapter 14, verses 1 and 7 through 14. After healing a man who had dropsy front of the Pharisees and the lawyers, Jesus goes on and shares with them a parable of a wedding banquet. Here now the Word of the Lord.

¹On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

⁷When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. ⁸"When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; ⁹and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place', and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to

you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. ¹¹For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

¹²He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Sermon: Unforeseen Opportunity Cost

Text: Hebrews 13:5-6 ⁵Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for God has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." ⁶So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?"

Please join me in a prayer. Loving God, thank you for being our Heavenly Father providing grace and patience. As we take steps to understand more of who you are, would you soften our hearts and quiet down our inner thoughts so that we may hear your voice echoing from deep within this morning. Maybe the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

There is a quote saying, "Everyone has a story to tell, everyone is a writer. Some are written in the books and some are confined to hearts."¹ At the Winchester Mystery House in San Jose, California, one can visit the story of Sarah Pardee. Sarah was an extraordinary woman in her time. She was considered a child prodigy who was fluent in four languages – in the Latin, French, Spanish, and Italian – and was one of the wealthiest women in the world at the time. She married William Winchester, the only son of Oliver Winchester, the owner of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company. Together they became parents of a little girl named Annie. However, joy of being a parent was short-lived as they grieved Annie's passing only 40 days later.² Then came two tragedies in her life: in 1880, her father-in-law died, and only a year later, her husband, too, died.

Sarah relocated herself to an eight-room farmhouse in Santa Clara Valley, which is now known as San Jose, to be near her (Pardee) relatives. In her depression, she sought out a counsel from a spiritualist, who told her that spirits would haunt her; but by building a home for them, she would not be harmed.

For the next 36 years, never ceasing construction took place to become the current mansion displayed for the public to see. The mansion ultimately contained 160 rooms, 13 bathrooms, 2,000 doors, 47 stairways and fireplaces, and a staggering 10,000 windows.³ It is an interesting mansion with *"a stairway that leads nowhere, a window that opens to reveal only a wall, [and] a doorway that leads to nothing."*⁴

Sometimes our fears and ambitions lead us to false belief that we are alone and no one else can understand us. It motivates us to take an action to respond to the emotional distress and causes us to spend enormous time and effort.

¹ Savi Sharma, Everyone Has A Story

² Annie Winchester (b. June 15, 1866 – d. July 25, 1866)

Wagner, Richard Allan. *"The Belle of New Haven". The Truth About Sarah Winchester*. Retrieved 28 August 2019.

³ <https://winchestermysteryhouse.com/sarajs-story/>

⁴ *New York Times*; May 31, 1970, Sunday; [San Jose, California](#).

Sarah could not have started the expansion of her home knowing that she will end up with 160 rooms and only 13 bathrooms, or to build so many bedrooms that she didn't use at all. But even with her blessed inheritance, the fame of being a Winchester, being highly educated, and having all access to the earthly possessions she ever wanted, ultimately, she felt as though she did not have enough. She was not content with what she had and who she was.

We, too, sometimes think that we do not have enough, and that we must labor harder to get to where we need to be or gain what we want. We fall into this trap of thinking because we have failed to see the world through our hearts. We are overlooking the blessings that God has placed in our lives.

There is a Korean proverb saying, 'Gather dust to build a mountain,' meaning that all little things can mount up to making a big difference. Likewise, we need to be able to identify the small blessings in our lives. Little things like having access to water at a turn of a knob to brush our teeth in the morning. Have you considered how blessed we are to have a clean, drinkable water that we can get to wash with every day? Millions of people around the globe do not have this blessing. How about a clean air that is filling our lungs at this moment? Believe it or not, there are people in Asia buying canned air from other parts of the world because of the smog and toxins in the air. We learned that we cannot place a numerical value of the smiles on the faces of our family members, friends, and beloved people around you, who are too precious and a blessing. We need to be content by being grateful for what we already have.

When we see the many blessings around us, we realize that God is the one that is pouring the labor of love upon us. Today's Scripture reminds us that God will never leave us nor forsake us. Romans echoes the same message by telling us that there is absolutely nothing – neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor dept, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁵ Matthew reminds us that God takes care of the birds and lilies of the field, yet we who are more valuable than them.⁶ So why are we worried and doubt that God will take care of us?

Rather than worrying about things, we have a responsibility to respond to God's generosity. We are God's ambassadors as well as co-heirs with Christ.⁷ We are not only benefactors of God's grace but also God's vessel to carry-on the good news for all to hear.⁸ Remember the parable of the talents? According Matthew 25:14-30, God-figure goes on a journey and

⁵ Romans 8:38-39

⁶ Matthew 6:25-34

⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:20 and Romans 8:17, respectively

⁸ Isaiah 61:1, Romans 10:15/Isaiah 52:7

“entrusted his property to them; gave one five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to [their] ability... The one who had received the five talents went off at once... and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.”⁹

Many of you know how this parable ends: to the ones who multiplied their talents got praise, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy servant. You have been trustworthy in a few things. I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master,’ while the other who did not do anything not only got scolded but also had the talent taken away to be placed in the hands of those who have multiplied it. The similar story in the gospel of Luke¹⁰ takes one step further and says, “from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.”¹¹ So not only the given talent was taken back but also all of one’s possessions.

This is where it gets complex but also interesting, so follow with me. This parable hints at God’s economic business model that ties into our daily spiritual walk and possible unforeseen opportunity cost that we are missing. Opportunity cost is an economical term that is defined as an amount of financial gain that one misses out on when choosing one alternative over another. One example would be considering how much money one could have made by using their college degree rather than being a pastor.

However, our God is not in a business of simply making money; God is in a business of reconciliation, turning people into fishers of people, making disciples of Christ,¹² and the currency that God uses to make that happen are various forms of blessings in our lives. To some are given five various forms of blessings, to another two, and to others one blessing each day. As we learn to recognize our own blessings and share it with others so that they too may identify their blessings in their own lives, we have successfully multiplied our given talents for the day.

More often than not, we are focused on laboring hard to provide ourselves and beloved ones, especially our children, grandchildren, and even our great grand-children for them to have a better life, education, quality of life, and the things we wished to have but were not able to. We might be doing well on our worldly gains, but how are we doing in our spiritual gains and blessings? Are they simply an unforeseen opportunity cost for our worldly leisure and treasure? Would you consider imitating God’s labor of love to our neighbors and our

⁹ Matthew 25:14-18

¹⁰ Luke 19:11-27, the parable of the Ten Pounds

¹¹ Luke 19:26

¹² Matthew 28:19-20 – Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...

beloved ones to increase ours as well as their spiritual portfolio and treasures that “neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal”¹³

Rather than worrying about things and creating our own works like Sarah Winchester, let us enjoy this day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Let us recount the numerous blessings we have each morning, sharing with one another new mercies and love that we receive every day from God. Let us use our gifts and talents to see the bright smiles on the faces of people we love around us. And let us be a living testimony, writing our own stories of God’s faithfulness in our spiritual journey. Amen.

¹³ Matthew 6:19-20