

Our Hearts True Home
Sermon for August 1, 2010
Old Home Day
Scripture: Hosea 11:1-11, Luke 12:13-21

It was on Christmas Eve in 1789 that 8 Deering men on horseback traveled to Thomas Merrill's house just down the road from here to discuss founding Deering Church. By the end of the evening, according to Don Johnson's "brief history" on our website, the men had composed the Church Covenant which still guides our congregation to this day. The church started out on a Calvinist conservative path of "the chosen few" but soon veered towards a more liberal theology, influenced by the Great Awakening where the preachers talked about a "more generous God who could offer salvation to everyone no matter what race or class." I highly recommend that all of you with computers go to our website to understand more about the struggles of this church for more than 200 years, struggles of budget, of theology, and of membership. Both the population of the town of Deering and the number of our church members rose and fell with the church membership hitting a low of three members in 1895. The coming of Dr. Eleanor Campbell and the summer people in the mid 1920's helped reinvigorate our Congregational church. In 1927 the Woman's Guild was founded and has been a solid organization for all these years. Our Margaret Colburn, now 102, was at that founding meeting and continues attending the

Guild now 83 years later. After worship today, you will hear much more about the history of our present church.

I find it fitting for Old Home Day that today's lectionary chooses its Hebrew Bible reading from Hosea 11, a chapter that talks about God's relationship with the people of Israel from their onset in Egypt to the present and on into the future when God will return the Israelites to their homes. Just as we will do later in our panel discussion, Hosea is remembering events that have happened in the life of this people. Even more important, Hosea describes what God has been and is like, how God has treated and felt towards the people of Israel. God's relationship goes from that of a tender, nurturing parent ("I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love.") to anger at the people's behavior. God considers punishment but then has a change of heart: "How can I give you up?...I will not execute my fierce anger...for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst." This passage shows the heartbreak of God and God's desire ultimately to redeem, to bring the scattered children home. In the end there is hope—the ones that have turned away, became disoriented and wandered from home, are called back by God. One writer, Anna Case-Winters says, "Only God is ultimate, only God can secure us and secure us, finally, against the need to be secured. God is our source and our end, the ground of our being and our hearts true home." (Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 3, 296).

This leads us to our Gospel lesson where Jesus tells a parable about a rich man who wanted more. He introduces it with these words, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." (V. 15) This farmer had so much he decided that he would tear down his old barns and build bigger ones to store all his grain and his other possessions. Rather than thinking about sharing with others, his greed was focused on accumulation and security. God calls him a fool for this kind of thinking, with Jesus ending the parable with "So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God." Eugene Peterson in the translation of the Bible called the Message has Jesus say, "That's what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God."

Our society in general seems to want more, believing that more is better. There's even a name for it, pleonexia—the insatiable desire for more; a condition of deep dissatisfaction with what one has; seeking fulfillment through the acquisition of possessions, prestige, or power.¹ It is certainly understandable for us to want security, to want to be able to provide for ourselves and our families in our old age. There was a very relevant online discussion amongst clergy this week wondering if our 401K's or 403's or IRA's are our barns. Do we keep putting more and more money away rather than sharing it with those in need? What about our panic at being able to

¹ From blogsite, United Method deviations.

pay the bills both at home and at church? Here are some of the comments I found interesting: "When we measure success by quantity, quality is often the greatest casualty." "Whenever we worship the created rather than the Creator, we have lowered our sights and limited our vision...It's the 'Who' that's at the center of our lives that matters." (Huey) And I really like this one from Cheryl Crow: "It's not getting what you want; it's wanting what you've got."

Some of you may think that being rich would help your anxiety and depression. The Wall Street Journal reported recently about a survey from the WHO and the Harvard Medical School that indicated that we in the United States are the most depressed people in the world. The 10 percent that suffer from some kind of clinical depression and the 18 plus percent that suffer from some anxiety disorder surpass those in both developed countries (Germany, Japan, and Italy and some underdeveloped countries such as Ukraine, Mexico, and Nigeria.

Each of us has to decide how we shall lead our lives. I believe that it is important to realize that wealth is not happiness, that money and possessions do not bring peace of mind. Love, hope, gratitude, and service are for me things that help me live a meaningful life. If we can all fill our barns with God instead of Self, I believe we will overcome and this lovely church will flourish.

Our forebears that founded and kept this church going must have often felt discouraged just as we do sometimes; however, their faith kept

them going. There was always someone like Esther Ellsworth. When in 1874, the Deering Church membership was down to 24, Don Johnson says of Esther: "She served as clerk, kept the church records and tried her best to infuse some life in the dying institution." Often in the past, our dear Bev Yeaple was the one who kept things going. In 1964 she was instrumental in pushing on for a full time minister by involving the church with the Conference office. According to an interview with Kay Bliss in Don's history on our website, when in 1977, the congregation was scared to vote to become a year round church, it was Bev's mother Edna Yeaple who was the most adamant that the experiment started on a trial basis should be continued. Mrs. Yeaple told the meeting, "Let's do it, we can do it. . . . You've got to have faith to go ahead." Others present at that meeting felt "If she has that much confidence, we shouldn't be scared." (Bliss interview, August 12, 1989)

So for all of these men and women of faith , both recent and long ago, I want to say thank you and bless you and your memories and your hope. So many of you gave us the example that quality of life is not in the things we amass but in our connection of love with God and with each other. I ask God to show us the way, the truth and the light. Amen