

Scripture: Luke 12:22-34

Sermon Title: "Say Cheese!"

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When an individual graduates from high school, or experiences any big life event like this, it is often a time to give gifts, right? And when it is a high school graduation, it is a time to give gifts that will make the next steps of their journey a little smoother. It may be providing the items that will be needed as the new graduate continues their education in some way, like getting the things they will need for a dorm room or the things they will need to be successful in their classes and continued learning in their trade. For some, it is a time of the big gifts, like a car to get too and from that first, full-time job or back and forth to school. It may be time to give a little cash to let them do what they want or get what they may need for the journey ahead.

Now, when I graduated high school, while I didn't get a car, I did get a bit of everything else. Still, the gift that has the most long-lasting effect on me was not money or some new item. Rather it was a collection of something old, a collection of memories. It was a photo collage that my Great Aunt put together. In this collage there were of course pictures of me from various ages. But then there were pictures of my mom, dad, and brother. My grandparents were there, even my paternal grandfather whom I never met for he died rather young in his late 40's. My uncle was there and my great aunt and great uncle were there too. These were the people who had the most impact on my upbringing. These were the people who were there through all that life brought.

And I will admit, this was no easy task for my great Aunt to do because, overall my family didn't have many photos taken. My mom and her mom both despised having their pictures taken unless they had adequate warning, and by adequate, I mean at least a week's notice of any pictures that would be taken so they could be properly put together and ready to go. But somehow, a few candid shots from over the years were uncovered and they were added to this collage. A collage which captured the past and the people who journeyed through it. And as I think about that collage, which still

hangs at the family farm in Pennsylvania, and as I think about the pictures that hang in my own home and the pictures of my expanding family, I see something. I think I see a glimpse of the kingdom of God.

In our scripture reading for today from the Gospel of Luke, we hear some familiar words which also appear in the Gospel of Matthew, words which call us to not worry. Words which call us to not worry about the things of this world – don't worry about food or where it will come from or clothing. Don't worry about these basic needs. But strive for the kingdom of God and all these things will be given to you. All these things will fall into place. Now, I don't know about you, but I feel that these are not always easy words to hear, or shall I say, easy words to follow especially when we are in a particular moment of need. In those moments, I know at least for myself, it is hard not to worry and this is a constant struggle for me and I believe for many. In the moment of need and in the moment that is bringing about the worry, it can be hard to see the truth in this teaching that Jesus shares. How can striving for the kingdom of God meet the need that I am facing in this very moment?

That's when I think back to that collage – a collage which again, in the photos shows us both the past and the people of this shared life. And so, when I look at this collage, I see the past experiences – of course I see the good times and I also see the struggles and challenges that my family faced – those moments that produced worry. I see the fear of losing the farm which came more than once in my lifetime. I see the health challenges that were experienced. I remember the times when having enough money for food was a worry and when there were no funds in the bank for clothing. I see the times of boundless joy and deep sorrow. That's the past that I see and when we look back at photos we tend to see everything that left behind, the good and the not-so-good. Then I see the people, and glimpses of the kingdom of God. And I remember how these people came together to celebrate the joys of life. I remember how when food was scarce for one, another shared, or when there was no money for clothing, that clothing was purchased by another. I remember the ways in which the sorrows of life were held

together and that when one was sick, others were there to offer care. And then, I remember the larger communities which did the same, the neighbors and our church community who were there through it all as well. By no means, did we do it all perfectly and there were definitely moments that were not God-inspired, but there was a constant striving for the kingdom of God which saw us through.

Now, what does the kingdom of God actually look like – what exactly are we striving for? Jesus talks a lot about this, including in seven different parables all in one chapter of the Gospel of Matthew! In summary, what I have come to believe is this - the kingdom of God is one where Christ's message of love and care takes deep root in the hearts of humanity. It is a place where many find a home and the welcome is expansive. It is a place where judgment is not ours to give out, but love surely is. The kingdom of God is a place where people find treasure, the treasures of a caring community and of knowing and living God's grace. It is where more and more people strive for righteousness, justice, and peace. If I had to sum it up, the kingdom of God looks like people and communities following the greatest commandments. To love God and to love neighbor. For when we do these things and the more people who are doing these things, more needs will be met. We won't do it perfectly; I feel like I say that a lot because it is true. And we shouldn't expect perfection, even as a community of faith. What we should expect and be committed to is a constant striving toward this kingdom and a place where grace will flow to forgive the shortcomings. We should expect a community which will forever strive for more and more glimpses of this kingdom. Glimpses that I see when I think about that collage. Glimpses I see within the photos in my own home and the memories they hold. Glimpses that I see sitting here today.

In just a few moments, at the end of our worship service today, all are invited to join us on the front steps to take an all-church photo. Whether you are a member, friend, or first-time visitor of our church, you are welcome to be in the photo, because the kingdom of God has an expansive welcome. Throughout our life as a congregation here, there have been a number of these types of photos taken. I've seen one taken when

Rev. John Potter served here and when Rev. Susie Craig was with you and though I don't recognize everyone in these picture, I think about the dedication to the work of kingdom building that was shared then and I wonder about all the ways that the congregation at that moment sought the kingdom of God. And those of you who are in these photos, I wonder what you see when you look back on them? Do you see memories of past joys which were celebrated together and the past challenges that were overcome with the help of one another? What actions of care and compassion do these pictures bring up? I don't expect that it was done perfectly and we shouldn't expect that either. But we should expect that constant striving for love and an openness with grace.

I'm filled with joy for the photo we will take today, one that I plan to have in my office here at the church and in my home. A photo to look at and remember the past we have already shared and the people who have shared of themselves to strive for those glimpses of God's kingdom. A photo that will remind us of the ways in which love has touched our world from the heart of Wiscasset. So today, as we smile big and say cheese, may it too be a commitment to love and grace, so that all who look back on this photo may also see the glimpses of God's kingdom. So be it and may it be so. Amen.