

February 26, 2023

## INADEQUATE PROVISION

Matthew 4: 1-11

I am reasonably sure that we have all heard the song “My Way”, by Frank Sinatra.

And now, the end is near  
 And so I face the final curtain  
 My friend, I'll say it clear  
 I'll state my case, of which I'm certain  
 I've lived a life that's full  
 I travelled each and every highway  
 And more, much more than this  
 I did it my way

Regrets, I've had a few  
 But then again, too few to mention  
 I did what I had to do  
 And saw it through without exemption  
 I planned each charted course  
 Each careful step along the byway  
 And more, much more than this  
 I did it my way

I find that to be a beautiful song, but I cannot say that it is a song that expresses my life and experiences. Maybe it does for some of you, and if it does, I am genuinely happy for you.

I have had some wonderful experiences in my life. I am from a large family, and I have a family of my own. I have been blessed with some beautiful family relationships, and along the way, I have formed some great friendships. I have had some good opportunities in life, and overall, I have been far more fortunate than many. For all of that, I am truly grateful and humbled.

But unlike Frank Sinatra, when I look back over my life, I have not just a few, but many regrets. Too many and too great to ignore.

My greatest regrets have not been about those things that I have, in faith or folly, attempted and failed at – I am thankful for many of those for I have learned

valuable lessons from them. My greatest regrets have been the times when, out of fear, desperation or convenience, I settled for less - not less in terms of possessions or positions - but less in terms of my purpose in life; the person I was fashioned and called by God to be.

That is what I want us to focus on today – the way we sometimes settle for less than what God calls us to be and do.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent, and as is usual, our attention is turned to the temptation of Jesus.

Matthew tells us that Jesus had been fasting in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards, he was famished. He wasn't just hungry, he was famished. To be famished means to be hungry to the point of suffering. It is to get to the point where one would do just about anything to get some food to end one's suffering. And the tempter knew that.

So the temptation begins with the tempter saying to Jesus: *'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.'*

The tempter played on what he believed was Jesus' desperation. Remember, Jesus was alone in the harsh barren wilderness, and being famished, he would have been in no state to trek back into town to get something to eat, so he was presented with an easy solution; *'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.'*

The issue in this temptation was not whether Jesus should have bread or not - there was no question that he needed food. The tempter's aim was to have Jesus focus so much on his quite urgent and legitimate need for food, that he would lose sight of his purpose – who he was called to be and what he was called to do.

But Jesus answered: *'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."*

In his response, Jesus did not deny the need for or the importance of food, rather, he pointed to its inadequacy - its inadequacy for a life in pursuit of God's good and great purpose. Making the point that such a life involves more than just seeking to satisfy our physical needs, however great and urgent they may be. *"One does not live by bread alone"*.

There are many things in life that we need and seek after - things that are good, important, necessary and even urgent; but sometimes in our quest for those things, we can lose our true selves. It is a mistake to believe that those things alone, however necessary and satisfying they may be, are enough to make us what we

were meant to be and can be. In our pursuit of such things, we may end up having a successful and comfortable life, but one that is not as meaningful and impactful as it was meant to be and could have been.

So we hear again the words of Jesus: *‘It is written, one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’*

What Jesus is saying here is that like food, there are many things that are good and necessary for our survival and well-being, but which, by themselves are inadequate, and we live more fully and meaningfully when we live in relationship with God.

This temptation that Jesus faced is the greatest temptation that we face; it is the temptation to understand our purpose and establish ourselves apart from God. It’s a temptation that seeks to exploit our needs and our vulnerability and play on our desperation and fears.

It is the temptation to define ourselves by what we have or think we need, rather than through our relationship with God.

There are so many things - good things, necessary things - that our society and culture present to us as being enough, by themselves, to give meaning and purpose to our lives, and often, when we achieve those things, we believe that we have arrived where we ought to be, when in fact we are not there yet, there is more to us. So again, we hear the words of Jesus: *“One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*

Regardless of where we are in life, regardless of what we have and have achieved, there will always be more to our lives, more to what we are called to be and do, because God continues to speak.

Every time we hear the appeal of the needy and suffering, regardless of where it is coming from, God is speaking to us. Every time we hear the cry of the sick and hurting, God is speaking to us. Every time we hear the mourning of the sad and the bereaved, God is speaking to us. Every time we hear the lament of the victims of injustice and indifference, God is speaking to us. Every time we hear the whispers of the fearful and anxious, God is speaking to us. Every time we hear the painful silence of the lonely, the neglected and the abused, God is speaking to us.

God is speaking to us telling us that we are not there yet, telling us that there is still work to be done and we cannot be satisfied to just rest in our comfort and achievements.

And similarly, every time we hear the cry of a baby, the laughter of children at play, the joyful music of a wedding celebration, the excited chatter of friends;

every time we experience the love of family and friends, the generosity of neighbours, the kindness of strangers; God is speaking to us, telling us that hope is alive, and there are yet more blessings to come.

So let us not diminish our life's purpose by settling for inadequate provision. Let us not fall for the temptation to believe that because our needs are satisfied, and we are at a place in life where we think we should be, our purpose in life is fulfilled. Let us not fall for the temptation to believe that we can adequately understand and fulfil our purpose apart from God.

We can only live more fully and meaningfully when we live in response to what God is saying to us. And God is still speaking – speaking through scripture and speaking through the joys and sorrows of life. And the more we listen, the closer we come to finding our whole selves. The more we listen and act on what we hear, the more inspired and empowered we become to fulfil our purpose.

And no matter what have been our experiences and at what stage in life we are, we are still and will always be, an important part of God's good and great purpose. Let us not lose sight of that. Let us not settle for less.

Rev. Sydney Elias