

**Building a Canoe**  
**The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Sunday, August 4, 2019**  
**The Rev. Paul McLain**

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

My father saw an ad in the back of a Popular Mechanics magazine for a do-it-yourself kit with everything you needed to build a kayak canoe in just one weekend. He thought it would be a great father-and-sons project so he ordered it.

**Seven** months later, after working on it every weekend and most week nights in my Dad's workshop, we finally built that kayak canoe. Looking back on all the added parts and tools he bought as well as all the time we invested in it, it would have been cheaper and much easier if he had just bought us an already made canoe. But he wanted to build it – and he wanted to build it with his sons.

In today's Gospel, a man wants Jesus to tell his brother to divide the family inheritance with him. Instead of honoring the man's request, Jesus does what he often does. He examines the deeper motives behind the request. He recognizes that the man's motive for wanting to divide the family inheritance is greed for the here and now – to get what he wants *this instant*. In essence, Jesus tells him, 'Forget about dividing the inheritance. Think instead about *building* an inheritance – an inheritance of the heart.'

Jesus tells him a story of a rich young fool. He has been blessed with abundant crops and he is worried about where to store them. He tears down his barns and builds bigger ones. His dream is not to share anything with those around him, nor is it to leave anything for those who come after him. His dream is to 'relax – eat, drink, and be merry.' The driving force around all his dreams, as well as all his waking thoughts, is himself. He wants to make sure he has instant happiness at all times. Even the structures he builds are solely for him, and they have a temporary nature about them. He will tear them down in a heartbeat if he needs bigger barns to give him a lifetime of instant gratification.

Even the church can get caught up in instant gratification. We can crave the idea of having more – more people, more giving, more ministry, more glory, and want and expect that to happen *right now*, instead of attentively listening to God and joining Christ in patiently building the church, person by person, life by life, soul by soul. When our cravings are only about ourselves and what we want instantly, our efforts to satisfy them will ultimately fail. When our hearts are open to being Christ's instruments of building up his kingdom, no matter how long it takes, his efforts through us will be blessed.

Jesus points us to a new way of thinking, a new way of being.  
It is a focus on joining him in building that which is eternal.

Yesterday, we were jarred by the news of yet another mass shooting as people were out doing what is ordinary this time of year, shopping for school supplies at a mall in El Paso. And this morning, we woke up to news of another mass shooting overnight in Dayton, Ohio. And while it did not result in as large a body count, we were just as jarred locally when two people were killed and one was injured at a shooting at the Walmart store in Southaven on Tuesday. These images can become fleeting and temporal as our minds quickly move on to the next shooting or the next major event.

But for the families of Anthony Brown and Brandon Gates here locally, and those of the victims in El Paso, Dayton, Brownsville, and Gilroy, the effects are lasting and will haunt them every day for the rest of their lives. The people shot are real, and their senseless deaths and critical injuries leave lasting holes in our hearts. Their deaths and wounds call upon us to take time to reflect on ways we can end gun violence once and for all.

Our way to honor the victims is to build something eternal, to build a society that is not only safe, but one that cherishes and treasures all our lives. And one that at long last finds a way to stop this madness. Our call is not just to long for better angels in our nation, but for us to get about the business of being the better angels.

I was especially moved this week when seeing the father of Stephen Romero, the 6-year old boy who was killed in the shooting at the Garlic Festival in Gilroy, California last Sunday. He talked about all the things they loved to do together. And I couldn't stop thinking that they won't have a chance to build more memories together. They won't have a chance to build a canoe together.

A few years ago, I went back to my Dad's old fishing camphouse on Lake Mary Crawford near Monticello, Mississippi. And there on the back porch was that kayak canoe we built. Forty years later, it was still in good shape, and it was being enjoyed by my nephews and my niece – a new generation. What surprised me when I looked at that canoe was that my fondest memories of it *were not* the good times I had of rowing it around the lake.

Instead, my fondest memories were of those evenings in my Dad's workshop when he taught us how to cut lumber, stain boards, and stretch fiberglass. They were evenings in which he shared with us his dreams of building something that would last beyond himself. And I am not just talking about the canoe.

Jesus teaches us that we have a choice. We can spend and waste a lot of time craving the fleeting treasures of an instant. Or we can be a part of the deeply fulfilling work of joining him in patiently building the eternal treasures of the heart. My father *gave* me such a treasure when he invited me to join him in building a canoe. *Amen.*