

Retirement

By Remington Willis

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I'm Remington, I have been a member here at Muhlenberg since 2011. I just finished a year of service with a program within the Episcopal Service Corps. I was one of six who were part of the Lutheran Episcopal Volunteer Network or LEVN. If this sounds familiar, you may have read or heard about my monthly updates.

In LEVN I lived in an intentional community with 5 other people, one of which you may know, Jake Shelor, who goes by Ray now, grew up and spent a lot of time around here and Caroline Furnace. His dad, Wayne, was the camp pastor of sorts, which had the family in the Virginia Synod. Ray also worked at Caroline Furnace and attended most of the synod youth events. So our small six person community had a great time in Sacramento, both working at our nonprofit organizations and creating memories with each other.

I had the amazing opportunity to work at 2 placement sites. The first was Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, where I worked directly with the children, youth and family minister. I specifically helped with children's chapel and Godly Play Sunday school.

My second location was at River City Food Bank, which is a local food bank in the busiest part of Sacramento. And they recently opened a second location in a community that is known for immigrant and refugee families, where I had the pleasure of working with them directly.

With all of this, a lot of planning went into it. I would help plan and prep for children's chapel and family services. I helped plan efficient ways for clients to get their food faster. Whether you're planning for work, or lunch, vacation, or your future, life can feel like it revolves around planning. Sometimes it works out great, and other time things will start to go wrong. But it is in these times of struggle where we learn to be flexible, accept the situation, and adapt.

One area of our lives that requires advanced planning is retirement. I've been told that I need to start thinking about retirement now, even though I'm only 22 years old, so I can plan and save longer. I hadn't and still haven't given much thought in planning *for* my future, but rather I focus on my future in general. Just in case the unexpected happens and I need to accept change in order to move forward with life.

In this parable, the rich fool... who I'm calling Walter... is the only character. He has such a successful farm that his most recent harvest won't fit in his current barns. One big question of

mine: Why don't we hear about anyone else in Walter's life? After all, how is one person supposed to maintain and harvest an entire farm by themselves? To be as successful as Walter, you need help.

So, Walter had farm hands, which weren't mentioned. And he should have sold some of his crops to the community, to become such a rich man. But he doesn't mention any community. And with this being a parable, God should have been brought up. Walter should have been singing God's praises or giving thanks to God for his abundance of crops. But, again, Walter never mentions God. In fact, not only does he not mention any of these people, he doesn't even acknowledge them.

Instead of consulting with the community or farm hands or God, Walter discusses his situation with himself. *He* asks what *he* thinks *he* should do with *his* crops from *his* farm. And from this discussion he seems to be planning for his future. Walter wants to tear down his current barns, so he can build bigger ones. His reasoning? To save enough so he can live out his golden years in peace.

Now Walter seems to be the opposite of a fool, because he's making a better life for himself. But he's considered a fool because he's being inconsiderate, unthankful, and just plain selfish.

More questions: Why is Walter not selling his crops at a reduced price, to help the hungry in his community? Why isn't he giving any of them to his farm hands? And why is he hoarding his riches for himself, does he think he's never going to die?

God calls him out on his behavior. This isn't how God's people are encouraged to act. God has given numerous lessons about not hoarding your belongings.

Don't keep your possessions for yourself, because they won't go with you to heaven. You may have fancy things and still have an abundance to spend while you're alive, but that doesn't matter, because we're all buried in the same size grave.

Having everything you want seems essential at times but wanting what you already have is the actual necessity. Throughout my year in LEVN, I had to learn to live simply. I had a guaranteed roof over my head with utilities, a monthly bus pass, and a monthly stipend that was under \$400. During this year I learned to want and appreciate the things I had, because I knew and interacted with people from the community that weren't as lucky. I also learned that making relationships and memories are more important to collect than physical items. Yes, a teddy bear or a necklace may be sentimental, but you don't *need* those things to remember. If anything, writing down experiences and taking picture, but while also experiencing the moment, are more helpful than any souvenir.

Plus, it is the relationships and experiences that God's people are encouraged to do. To go out, meet new people and talk with them, and just enjoying being in that moment. These are lessons I hope to continue to take with me.

When God asks, Walter who will receive his physical inheritance, there aren't too many answers. Seeing as Walter was being rich towards himself, God likely won't allow others to gain his possessions, just in case they also become rich towards themselves. So when you feel the need to buy something expensive that you don't need, consider doing something rich towards God. Volunteer at Our Community Place, make a dish to share at Open Arms, read to kids at Second Home, or ring the bell for Salvation Army.

I want to thank Muhlenberg for their never-ending support, while I was richly serving and sharing my treasures with the community throughout my year of service. Without putting words in Mycah's mouth, I'm sure she is just as appreciative as I am for you're continued support, as we start our Master of Divinity journey with passion. And will definitely make Muhlenberg proud.