

Sermon by Lynn E Cunningham. August 19, 2007. Proper 15, Year C. Jeremiah 23:23-29; Heb 12:1-7; Lk 12:49-56

1. Today I want to make a plea that everyone shop locally. Whenever you have a choice, shop locally and support Dubois' local institutions.
2. This is not a meeting of the Dubois Chamber of Commerce. My point is, how and where people shop has a big effect on the kind of community that is sustained in a small town like Dubois. The quality of any community reveals how well the people in that community are living out the Second Great commandment to "love thy neighbor as thyself."
3. Today's lessons are all about God building human communities.
4. When you are trying to make up your mind about where to get your groceries, your clothing, your gasoline, first take a hard look at whether you can buy locally, and only if you cannot, then shop somewhere else. When your dollars are spent elsewhere, the Dubois economy and community is weakened.
5. Also, if you enjoy St. Thomas, and want to see it continue and thrive, this church needs the strong financial support and active participation by every one of you. I wil talk next week aboauat the need for active participation in St. Thomas.
6. Meanwhile, shop locally!
7. I love Dubois, I think all of us do.
8. But two things happened in recent months that drove me to realize that people here must do more than just have a warm feeling about the town. Everyone needs to put their dollars and their action where their love is. Two things made me realize this.
9. First, I became aware of how deeply stressed the local economy is by lack of shoppers during the off season. Second, I just learned how little the Dubois area had to offer the ancient Indians who stayed here, because the land is such desert. The experience of the ancient Indians trying to survive in this valley has something to teach us today about the need to support our own community.
10. Let me go over this second point first. This summer, I participated in an exploration of a sheepeater Indian encampment high in the mountains near here. I was with a small team of professional archaeologists, some from the University of Wyoming. We were all thrilled to find the remains of this ancient encampment. Then about two weeks ago, I attended a lecture at the Headwaters by another University of Wyoming archaeologist who described his finds at a similar sheepeater encampment high in the mountains near Cody. Remains of Indian life found at each encampment were similar.
11. What struck me is how little there was in the way of physical evidence of the camps. These ancient people did not stay long in one place, and they did not manufacture very much while they visited the Dubois area. If I compare the tremendous material wealth found in many other Indian sites in the new world, what was left over here is pretty thin. Think of the huge buildings made by Indians in Chaco Canyon in New Mexico. Think of the large Hopi villages. Think of the Mound Builder sites in southern Illinois. Here in our area, there is almost no pottery, no large buildings, no evidence of large irrigated fields.
12. Why so little Indian material left in Dubois? Because these high mountain valleys do not have the climate or the soil to provide the amount of farming and animal raising needed to allow folks living here to build up much in the way of material wealth.
13. I just had visitors from back east stop in, and one of them commented, Lynn, where are the fields with crops like wheat and corn, and vegetables? She grew up in rural Pennsylvania with its expansive farmland. Where are the crops in rural Wyoming?
14. People around here do grow things. Mary Ellen and the church have had wonderful success with growing things in the church garden. But supporting ourselves on locally grown fruits and vegetables would be a difficult challenge. Those who have tried to do so in the past, have not done it for very many years.

15. Dubois does not offer much in the way of local resources, except its incredible mountain scenery and badlands beauty. To live here even temporarily, people in a community must have had to work to support each other.
16. At the same time that I was learning how thin on the ground was the Indian existence here, several people have clued me in to the fact that most of the stores here barely make it through the off season financially. I said this before in a sermon a few weeks ago. Some businesses borrow money to pay ongoing expenses in the winter, and then try to pay the loans back during the summer.
17. Another indicator is that many local businesses are up for sale. The Merc, the Outlaw Saloon, the Absaroka Winds, and others.
18. Several buildings on main street are standing vacant because no one can afford to pay rent. Jeff Sussman did a good renovation of the retail building on the corner over here, and now he can, I assume, only afford to rent stores there for what it takes to pay his building costs. But almost no tenants have even wanted to try to rent there, because of the difficulty of making a business succeed here.
19. Local businesses and local institutions will not survive, unless local people actively support them.
20. What happens if these businesses and institutions do not survive? Dubois residents will find themselves without local retail shops and businesses when they really need them.
21. This is why I am saying again, Dubois residents need to choose to shop here whenever possible.
22. Sometimes patronizing a local business can be challenging. This week I went out to dinner at a local restaurant with our house guests. The food was served an hour late. Some problem had come up in the kitchen. If I had been at a restaurant in Washington, D.C., we might have simply walked out. But in Dubois, the best approach is to make a complaint to the hostess, remember how much of a struggle it can be to run any business here, and then be willing to go back again and again and encourage the owner to do better.
23. Shopping locally at the Opportunity Shop is vital as well. The Opp Shop is a huge effort by this church and this community to recycle local dollars and reuse local goods, while providing low cost clothing and furniture to the community. The store has experienced some shake ups in the management this past week.
24. But the vestry and I remain completely confident that the Opp Shop will continue to prosper and serve this community for a long time to come.
25. Use the Opp Shop, as well as use all the other stores and institutions in town. What happens from shopping elsewhere?
26. My niece, Laura, lives in a town of similar size to Dubois, Beatty, Nevada, sixty miles north of Las Vegas. It has no particular local economy. Most people drive down to the big city of Las Vegas to do their shopping and other business. There seems to be no plumber or electrician or medical personnel in Beatty. It is a community that is drying up and blowing away, in part because the people living there seem not to have learned how to love and support it. We can avoid falling into Beatty's trap.
27. Support local efforts like the new NOD program. Go to the Skip Ewing concert and bid on the auction items to support our local health clinic. Take out a book at the library every so often. Buy books at Julie's Two Ocean Books. Shop at the Water Wheel for your gifts. Did I mention the need to buy your alcoholic beverages locally?
28. Okay, when is he going to get to the part about Jesus?
29. Jesus is the best teacher of what it means to live in community. If Jesus is saying anything in the gospel it is that Christians have to learn to live in community with one another and with God. Underlying my plea to shop locally and support local institutions is the reality that only in community will you and I find our way to God. The second great commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself is not just about one on one taking

care of a nearby neighbor. Loving one's neighbor includes acting to support and nurture the entire community of persons where we have chosen to live. Shopping down country, staying away from church on Sunday, skipping local fund raisers such as the buffalo BBQ or the Skip Ewing Concert, are like saying to your neighbors in Dubois, I do not really need you. It is like saying, I can live without you. If as a group Dubois residents say that too often, there will not be the Dubois that we enjoy, but just another hollowed out and empty small rural town.

30. Shop locally, nurture the community of neighbors here, and pray for them as well.
31. In Jesus name, Amen.