

Luke 12:13-21

¹³Someone from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” ¹⁴But Jesus said to him, “Man, who appointed me to be a judge or an arbitrator over you?”

¹⁵Then he said to them, “Watch out and be on guard against all greed, because a man’s life is not measured by how many possessions he has.”

¹⁶He told them a parable: “The land of a certain rich man produced very well. ¹⁷He was thinking to himself, ‘What will I do, because I do not have anywhere to store my crops?’

¹⁸He said, ‘This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and goods. ¹⁹And I will tell my soul, “Soul, you have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy. Eat, drink, and be merry.”’

²⁰“But God said to him, ‘You fool, this night your soul will be demanded from you. Now who will get what you have prepared?’

²¹“That is how it will be for anyone who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

It’s Not about the Money

I.

I’ve gone through it twice now. Sibling groups inheriting from their parents. In both cases, all the siblings were concerned as much about making sure that the others weren’t cheated or left with less than any other sibling. Perhaps it was because what was left of the parents’ assets wasn’t tremendously large.

On the other hand, I’ve seen sibling groups quibble over just a few thousand dollars. This one insisting that she deserves more because she spent more time with her parents. That one insisting he deserved more because he was the one who made sure all their paperwork was taken care of properly.

A dispute over an inheritance is what led to Jesus’ parable in today’s Gospel. “Someone from the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me’” (Luke 12:13, EHV). Sometimes someone from the Pharisees or the teachers of the law would try to present Jesus with an issue to try and trap him. This time that does not seem to be the case. A crowd of thousands of followers of Jesus had gathered to listen to him speak.

Previous to today’s reading, Jesus had been teaching this crowd about many important things. He warned them against hypocrisy (Luke 12:1-3). He told them to fear God, not people (Luke 12:4-7), and told them that God knows everything going on in their lives, and that they are of great worth to God. He encouraged them to confess him (Luke 12:8-12), teaching that those who believe in Jesus would find forgiveness from God, but those who denied Jesus have rejected that forgiveness.

At least one fellow in the crowd had something else on his mind. “That’s all well and good, Jesus, but let’s get to what’s really important—it’s all about my money!”

Long ago and far away I knew a successful businessman. His business was thriving and growing. Besides his main residence he had a lakefront home. He had campers and boats and four-wheelers and snowmobiles. Every recreational vehicle you can imagine was kept in his various barns and storehouses.

He and his family were all quite happy and enjoyed the fruits of his labors. Many people envied him. Life was so easy; the good times were seemingly endless.

Then it happened. No, not some accident. His life wasn’t demanded from him, as the man in Jesus’ parable. Instead, charges of fraud were leveled against him.

It turned out that the whole thing was a house of cards. He was living a lie. Even his wife and children didn’t know how much of a lie it was. The business was *not* thriving, the way

it appeared to be. Every single thing he “owned” he did not *really* own—it was all a huge, unpayable mountain of debt.

After being found guilty, it was all gone and he was alone. The stuff that was such a source of pride and joy was no longer his. He was dejected and despondent.

To that man from the crowd who was so concerned about his money, Jesus said: “Man, who appointed me to be a judge or an arbitrator over you?” (Luke 12:14, EHV). I found that to be interesting. Jesus is the judge of the world. At the Last Day, he *will* be the One before whom all must appear to hear his verdict.

An arbiter is someone who settles disputes over the division of assets, as would be needed to determine how an inheritance was to be divided. This wasn’t something Jesus was here for.

II.

Jesus began by saying: “Watch out and be on guard against all greed, because a man’s life is not measured by how many possessions he has” (Luke 12:15, EHV).

Jesus’ parable focuses on possessions. In fact, the second half of this verse on the screen talks about possessions—stuff. People naturally focus lots of time and attention on stuff. The word for greed in the Greek indicates “having more,” then “receiving more,” and finally “*wanting* more.” Two Commandments are devoted to coveting. The desire for things a person doesn’t have is strong.

Notice, however, the little word *before* greed: “all.” Greed is not confined to possessions. In fact, the concept of that Greek word for greed also includes a desire for more power. You can think of plenty of examples of people who want more power. The things they are willing to do and the lies they are willing to tell to obtain more power or retain their power are shocking.

There’s still more to greed in Greek. It includes seeking prestige and fame for oneself. Who looks for more fame? It isn’t just influencers and podcasters. Looking for “likes” and “retweets” seems almost universal. Even if you’ve never logged in to a social media account, you like it when someone else validates your opinion, don’t you?

Yet another aspect of greed in Greek is the will to press one’s advantage. Seeking to be known as superior to others in whatever your chosen area, from music to sports to academic excellence.

“Watch out and be on guard against *all* greed.” So says Jesus. Possessions are just one part of the equation.

Then the parable about possessions begins. “The land of a certain rich man produced very well” (Luke 12:16, EHV). Notice that the person in the earthly story with a heavenly meaning was already rich. Nothing in Jesus’ parable suggests that the rich man had been fraudulent in acquiring his wealth—he was simply well off.

But where was his focus? Even without looking again at the verses of the parable you can hear the man speaking. I, I, I. My, my, my. All his focus was on himself and his plans and his cunning business sense. All his focus was on himself and the future life of leisure he expected.

In fact, Jesus emphasizes the depth of his depravity when he tells of the man’s thoughts: “I will tell my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy. Eat, drink, and be merry’” (Luke 12:19, EHV). “I will tell my *soul*...” The very depth of his spiritual being was most impressed with the stuff he had and the fun he anticipated because of his possession of that stuff. To his soul, the abundance of his belongings had become his gods. Perhaps his gods were even more personal than that—he looked inside himself, to his own soul, as his god.

This is what Jesus’ focus is with this parable, turning greed into gods. *All* greed; *any*

kind of greed—the greed for things, or greed for fame or power or anything else you can think of. In the end, the selfishness of greed takes the place of God.

III.

In the First Reading, Solomon spoke about his personal experiment with worldly things. He had experience. He was the Elon Musk of his day. There was nothing money could buy that he didn't have or couldn't easily obtain. "Nothing but vapor," Ecclesiastes said. "Totally vapor. Everything is just vapor that vanishes'... ²²For what does a man gain through all his hard work, through all the turmoil in his heart, as he works so hard under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1:1, 2:22, EHV). From his own experiences Solomon had learned that stuff was less than satisfying.

Jesus concluded his parable by saying: "That is how it will be for anyone who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21, EHV). Real treasure isn't to be found in the greed of wealth or power or fame or any of the other things you might put up there as gods.

Real treasure is found in your relationship with God. Paul says in today's Second Reading; "Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:2-3, EHV). "You died," says Paul. That death is the death of your Old Sinful Nature in baptism. He says it even more plainly in his Letter to the Romans: "We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death" (Romans 6:4, EHV). Jesus' death on the cross for sins becomes our death in baptism. Being baptized into his death means that the payment for sins Jesus declared to be finished belongs to us through this adoption into his family.

Solomon said of his earthly wealth: "I must leave it all to the man who comes after me" (Ecclesiastes 2:18, EHV). The rich and powerful might be able to pass on their wealth to future generations, but Jesus has passed *eternal* wealth on to you. You are part of the eternal family of God, set to gain the greatest inheritance there is when your Lord Jesus calls you home. Set your mind there.

IV.

While you wait for your greatest inheritance, consider Solomon again: "There is nothing better for a man than to eat and to drink and to find joy in his work. This too, I saw, is from God's hand" (Ecclesiastes 2:24, EHV). It all comes from God. The things come from God. The forgiveness of sins that becomes yours comes from God as the Holy Spirit works faith in your heart. The contentment you experience as you find joy in your work comes from God.

A few weeks ago, I sat in contentment out on my deck drinking my morning coffee and looking out over the holdings of my vast estate. (Those who were there last week to visit Raquel have seen my yard and know how ludicrous that sounds.) I looked back at the shed in the corner of the yard and said, not realizing at that moment that this text was coming up, "I need to tear down my barns and build bigger ones." I immediately followed that up with, "of course, if God demands my life today, I *will* go to heaven, because it's not about the money."

That's the key to Jesus' parable. Life is not about the money. Don't trust in it. Don't set your heart on it. How much you have or how little you have is not what's important in life.

Jesus is what is important. Faith in what Jesus gives you through his death on the cross is what puts all your possessions in perspective. Faith in Jesus means that you don't look to yourself any more; not as a replacement for God, not even as the source of your stuff. Because of your faith in Jesus you know that God, the giver of every good and perfect gift, has given you the mind and the body and the opportunity you have had to work for those things.

It's not about the money. It's all about Jesus. Amen.