

Luke 12:13-21 August 3, 2025

Thousands of people are gathered to hear Jesus, so many they are trampling on one another – so Luke tells us. Jesus he has been speaking to them warnings (of whom to fear – God, not man) and encouragements, even tender things. Revere God above all else; the body may be killed at anytime, but the soul resides with God, who knows everything about you - and loves you. Jesus has said to them God sees every sparrow that falls, and even the hairs on your head are all counted – do not be afraid, you are of more value than many sparrows.

People were listening, really listening, so when a voice in the crowd called out, “tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me” everyone heard it. A matter of interest to many. The law of primogeniture was irksome to more than one person. Why should the first born be favored? 1<sup>st</sup> century inheritance laws were detailed and complex. Nonetheless, the rule of primogeniture was clear and it included control of inheritable property and authority over related family matters – including when to distribute the inheritance. The eldest received a double portion, a second son a single portion, if there were more sons, each received a single portion of what remained after the double portion to the eldest son. Daughters did not inherit except in very unusual circumstances – women – wives, daughters, and female slaves – were counted as property and part of the inheritance.

Jesus is not an arbitrator; he is not there to settle disputes regarding inheritance matters. However, the question opens the way for a parable that is responsive regarding the matter of wealth and possessions, and is related to the teaching that preceded the request. Although the parable is for everyone listening, it speaks to the younger brother who spoke up as well as the elder brother (who was likely present). Both would recognize the point that Jesus is making to them - and all of us.

The man in the parable is focused solely on himself. He is occupied congratulating himself for all that he has. It does not occur to him to share his abundance, it does not occur to him ease

another's burden. Rather, he revels in the idea of luxuriating in his abundance for many years, enjoying himself with many good and delightful things. There is no thought of using his time for the good of others or to serve God, or even to thank God for what he has. He will die surrounded by his abundance, surrendering it all to what purpose he knows not. He has missed the most precious thing of all – knowledge of God in this life and love of his fellow man.

The parable does not say that it is wrong have wealth. To think that is to focus on the wrong point. Wealth is the example used to point to what is to be considered carefully. The parable warns us to not be possessed by possessions nor be presumptuous of one's life. Jesus warns against greed – all kinds of greed.

Greed is the servant of idolatry, remember. There are many idols – little gods – that would seize our affection and loyalty. Fame; power; position; privilege; knowledge; and not only in the large sense of these things, in the interactions of daily life, also. The temptation to seek approval and public acknowledgement of our work, skill, talent, position, etc. is there every time we open our eyes. One need not be wealthy to be possessed by one's possessions.

My first computer, was gifted to me. Although it was really just a little more than a glorified typewriter – it was mine! I was not eager to share it and did so only reluctantly. I did not really like the thing, but again – it was mine and I felt very privileged to have it. I shared with a friend my reluctance to loan it to someone who asked me to use it; that friend, and she was a friend indeed because she shared her honest response to my comments – said: I did not know you were so possessive of things. I was shocked – I did not know I was that possessive either! It was a very humbling moment.

The one who asked Jesus to arbitrate an inheritance was feeling the sting of what felt unfair – the eldest receiving the largest portion of the family inheritance, plus the father's authority. If a

daughter inherited any wealth at all, then she was obligated to marry within their father's clan – to keep the wealth within the clan, and could only marry with the permission of the eldest son.

What are our young people inheriting from us? Our society wants them to “inherit” a value system that tells them they are measured by how much they have in terms of money, cars, position, phones, followers on social media, clothes – so many of the young value fame over almost everything else, now.

What are we Christians giving them as an inheritance? What possessions do we treasure and want to hand on? Love of God? The habit of Mercy? The practice of Justice? The giving and receiving of forgiveness? The knowledge they belong to God and they are loved. Always loved. If we would do that, how shall we do that as a church? What will you do individually as a follower of Jesus Christ? Do you, can you, speak to the young of such things? Does your life show them the truth of God's love and mercy?

The keeping of possessions is a very human trait and one that has been to the benefit of humanity and to many individuals. We pass knowledge and history one generation to the next through many things we value – possessions of meaning and purpose. Museums and libraries and great buildings exemplify that. In families, we pass on grandmother's wedding ring, granddad's fine watch, paintings and furniture, jewelry and silver, land and money. There is nothing wrong with that. Family stories of love, faith, failure, and grace are a precious treasure to bequeath to the next generation.

It is holding things more dear than the love of God that is harmful. Allowing ourselves to think first of preserving and enlarging what we have, when we already have an abundance, rather than having a thought for those less fortunate than ourselves may lead one to a kind of blindness, blind to the injustice that is all around, and to hardening one's heart against the obvious needs of the poor.

Abundance is not only about tangible wealth. Abundance comes to us in many ways – education, influence, power, fame, acknowledgement, health, etc. There has been many a great talent that never came to light – or full flower because of poverty or other limiting circumstances, and because those with the influence and ability never gave anything to such little seen ones so as to make their talent blossom where it could be shared and appreciated by many.

Possessions have the power to preoccupy heart and mind. We delight in having things that make our lives easier, in things that are beautiful; things that give us status in the eyes of others. Such things can overtake our desire for God. The more we linger in relishing our possessions, the harder and harder it becomes to change the inner life. Until one day, we may discover to our dismay, that we cannot free ourselves from our possessions. They have come to possess us! Work at letting go of those things that would hold you fast.

Many years ago when my youngest grandson was very young, he had come to visit and spend the night for the first time at my home. The windows in my house are tall – nearly ceiling to floor – and he stood looking out at the dark – all the dark outside. He said, grandma, I am afraid. I assured him there was nothing out there to be afraid, and assured him nothing bad would happen to him while he was with me. To which he said, “what about burglars – burglars could come.” I said to him that burglars would not come. He said, after looking around the room, “your right, grandma, you don’t have anything anybody would want.”!

A grateful heart turned to God in all circumstances, offering all that we are and have is the expression of our love of God – remembering that the most important thing is to be, not to have. Remember, we live that we may know God. Amen.

