

Sermon Text: Luke 12:13-21

This story today is part of a sequence in the teachings of Jesus. He is sharing with the hearers that we need to be ready for the coming judgment.

In this story, we hear about wealth and greed. There are multiple passages throughout Luke where he deals with this issue. Today's passage might be one of the most famous. However, Luke is not the only writer that deals with this issue, it can be found throughout the cannon.

In my experience, when we read this passage and then have the bible study or hear the sermons, it deals mostly with the dad who died and we do not examine the conversation that Jesus had with the young man. This morning, I am hoping to touch base on both of them and maybe give you some insight on why the younger brother decided to approach Jesus even though it is very apparent that Jesus does not want to have a conversation on who should be receiving the inheritance.

Before, we step into the text, we need to know and understand that this story comes to us as Jesus and his disciples are continuing their journey. There are thousands who have gathered. Even though there was a huge crowd gathered, Jesus primary concern was his disciples. Yet, a demand came from the crowd.

The younger brother did not even come with a question to Jesus, instead he came to Jesus with a demand. "Jesus, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Now, there is law that clearly states what should happen. In Deuteronomy and in Numbers, it is laid out quite clearly. In this circumstance, the older son should receive a double portion of the inheritance. Thus, the older brother would receive 2/3 of the inheritance and the younger brother would receive 1/3 of the inheritance.

However, Jesus does not want to deal with the inheritance demand. Now, I want you to know that the request or the demand is not unusual. It was extremely common in first-century Palestine for Jews to ask rabbis for a ruling. This young man saw Jesus as a respected rabbi, thus the reason for addressing him as teacher. When he calls Jesus a teacher, he acknowledges his authority to render a decision in this case.

Instead of rendering a decision, Jesus gives him some advice and then he gives the crowd some advice and then he shares with them a parable. The parable is one that many of us are very familiar with. Although, the majority of us may want to push the parable aside and then hope and pray that the preacher is too scared to be preach a sermon on stewardship. But, before we take a venture into the parable; let's take a look at the advice that Jesus gives to the younger brother and to the crowd.

To the younger brother: "Mister, what makes you think it's any of my business to be a judge or mediator for you?"

In this simple sentence, Jesus is challenging the young man to free himself from having a preoccupation with material cases.

To the crowd, "Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot."

Now, when Jesus said this, I do not believe that he is against us saving for our retirement or our future needs. I also don't think that God doesn't want us to eat, drink and be merry and enjoy what God has given us. I think that we can take a look at the stories in the bible and see that Jesus spent time eating and drinking with people and enjoying life. However, he did it with individuals and he also was extremely clear about where his true security laid.

Jesus then expands on greed by giving them the parable on a farmer who tore down their barns and built bigger barns. The parable is pretty explicit, Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool to teach again greed.

Now, if you want me to boil it down to one sentence for you, I echo the words of Niveen Sarras when she states that our secured life does not depend on possessions, but on entrusting one's life to God.

I want to encourage you take some time and re-read the story and notice these four components of the story:

- (1) The number of times that the word “I” appears
- (2) The number of the times the word “my” appears
- (3) The confident repetition of what he “will” do
- (4) In the story, there is no mention of God

In this story, there is no one else except him and his goods.

For us, I think that the challenge is to live faithfully. We need to constantly take a look at our lifestyle and our financial choices while participating in the community that we live in and helping those in need.

It seems like the man did not help or serve those in his communities. As Lutherans, we are called to serve all people following the example of Jesus. This can come in many forms. Yes, it can come in the forms of the treasures that we have, but it can also be in the form of our times and our talents.

When we take a look at greed and I believe it comes in many forms we can hang our hat on the fact when we hold onto greed; it makes us worry about the future instead of trusting God; who holds onto our future.

Greed destroys us.

Generosity blesses us.

How can we lean into generosity instead of greed?

I am not sure if this will resonate with you or not or if you can speak from personal experience, but like the rich farmer; many of us are tempted to think that having large amounts of money and possessions stored up will make us feel more secured. However, sooner or later we learn that no amount of property or wealth can keep us secure. Then, more importantly, we realize no matter how much we accumulate, the accumulation can not keep our relationships healthy and our families from falling apart.

I have not been with a family member or a church member who at their end of life wished that they had stayed at work a little longer to make a little more money. Instead, they talk about that they wished that they would have spent more time where life really matters. Death has a way of clarifying what really matters. With the farmer, he ends up coming empty. On his last day, he has all that he believes he wants and more, yet at the end; which comes that very night; it proves to be inadequate.

Thus, when I stand back and look at this story, I think that it is about priorities. It is about who is truly God in our lives. Is it the God of the universe or is it the false gods that we try to fill our lives up with?

In our bible study on Tuesday, we reread the last verse a few times. Here it is in the NRSV that we use at church:

So, it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God. I shared with them that I think that language could be a little confusing and I appreciated how Eugene Peterson translates.

Hear his translation and see if it helps:

*That's what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God.*

We are able to be rich towards God and to set our minds on things that are above because our old self has died and we have a new life in Jesus.

Maybe if we can fill our barns, our hearts, with God then we can have a different way to align our lives. When our focuses shift to God and Others, then our lives will be walking with God's mission to bless and redeem the world. Now, *“may you live as if that were the most true thing about you.”*