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GOD'S TREASURES AND RICHES

Luke 12:13-21; Proper 13C-Pentecost 8C; August 2-3, 2025

A man asked Jesus to intervene in an inheritance dispute with his brother. **“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But [Jesus] said to him, “Man, who made Me a judge or arbitrator over you?”** The specific dispute between these brothers is not stated, but the Law of Moses stipulated that the firstborn son received a double portion of the inheritance (Dt. 21:17). Since Jesus went on to warn against **“covetousness”** it appears like a younger brother felt it was not fair that his older brother got twice as much; the younger coveted what the elder had received.

When the objection, “That’s not fair!” is raised, I’ve been told that “fair” only applies to baseball and what happens each August. The Martin County Fair starts next week; there is Fairstand cleaning and a potluck Sunday/today at 3:00 PM, for those able to help.

Actually, “fairness” is a biblical concept, but it doesn’t apply to those who want to get more, their fair share. In 2 Corinthians 8, St. Paul teaches about giving an offering to help suffering Christians in Judea. **“For if the readiness [to give an offering] is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.”**

God does not define “fairness” as everyone receiving the same thing, but as those with more giving more in offerings than those with less. God’s concept of “fairness” does not apply to what we want to get, but to what we are able to give, to be “fair” to those in need of our help. God has made us stewards of what is His for the sake of others.

The brother in our Gospel today wanted to get what his brother had received as inheritance; he coveted what God had not given to him. He would not be satisfied until he got what he wanted, though it is often the case that those who covet never end up contented; their desire for more grows the more they have.

Against this attitude, Jesus teaches us today: **Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.**” And He told them a parable, saying, **“The land of a rich man produced plentifully...”** the parable of the Rich Fool. This parable expands on an earlier parable in Luke, the Seed Sown on the various soils. The Rich Fool is an example of someone planted in thorn-infested ground. **“Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it... As for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature”** (8:7, 14).

The rich man in the parable foolishly let the cares of the world, riches and pleasures of life choke out hearing the Word of God's kingdom. The man was already rich when his land produced in even greater abundance so that his wealth was guaranteed for years to come, but he never acknowledged that all he had was a gift from God. **“He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’”** His thoughts and words were self-centered: I, I, I, my, my, my... He never thought of God once when considering the great abundance he had.

This brings us back to the request that led to this parable: **“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”** For the Jews listening to Jesus, the word “inheritance” was loaded with meaning. The land itself they lived on was an inheritance received from God; something promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. But this inheritance was more than just a promised land, it was where God's people would hear His Word, live by His grace through faith in Him, and not worship any other gods that had been connected to that land by the Canaanites before them. Their inheritance was from God and connected directly to faith in God. If they lost their faith, they would lose their inheritance.

Jesus' Word promises an inheritance in His kingdom for all people by faith in Him, good seed sown on good soil producing bountifully.

This inheritance is ours through faith in Jesus. **“We are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ”** (Ro 8:16b-17a). Heirs are the ones who receive an inheritance. **“God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God”** (Ga 4:4-7). Baptized into Christ, we have **become heirs, having the hope of eternal life** (Titus 3:7 NIV). Christians have an inheritance, treasures from God.

Jesus contrasts God’s treasures with the things this world considers treasures and riches. **“Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”** Who we are as God’s children determines how we see our possessions. If we treasure the things of this world and despise the things of God, we will lose our heavenly inheritance.

Jesus states this in Matthew six: **“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”** (6:9-21) As Christians, we trust God’s promises to us in Christ. **“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you”** (Mt 6:33).

This helps us understand how to apply the parable of the Rich Fool. **“God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”** What does it mean to be **“rich toward God??**

If trusting in worldly wealth for happiness and security is foolish, what does it mean to wise and rich toward God? God has laid up for us treasure in heaven which is ours through faith in Jesus, and this faith trusts in His righteousness. True wisdom is realizing that all who believe in God, rich or poor in worldly terms, are rich with God’s treasures.

To use the language of Luther's *Small Catechism*: God has purchased and won us from all sin, from death, and the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with the holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death of His Son, Jesus Christ, that we may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom. God spent His entire fortune on redeeming worthless sinners like us: Jesus, priceless treasure.

Instead of condemning us as guilty for being the sinners we are and giving us what we deserve, eternal death in hell, God has credited to us the righteousness of His Son. This is called "the doctrine of justification," the heart and soul of Christian faith and our treasure. **"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."**

This is in stark contrast to the foolishness of this covetous world as demonstrated in the rich man in Jesus' parable. He never considered the God who had given him worldly riches, which he trusted in for life and security. **"I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'"** As St. Paul noted in our Epistle from Colossians 3, **covetousness is idolatry** (3:5), the worship of things rather than God.

As I get older, something I think about more is what I will leave my children as an inheritance. The possessions I consider precious may be worthless to them. Money is valuable in this world for buying stuff, but it's only temporary. The only thing I can take with me when I die is my soul, which was bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus. My body will go the way of all flesh when it dies, awaiting its resurrection in glory on the last day, redeemed to live forever.

I can't leave my faith to my children as an inheritance – faith is a gift from God alone – but I can leave worldly wealth to the Church for the support of the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments for the sake of my children and those still in this world. The Church will always need worldly resources as long as this world exists. My inheritance from God is secure by faith in Jesus. His question, **"And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"** remind us that they are actually God's treasures and riches to be distributed according to His good and gracious will. Amen.