

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

SHARING THE DIVIDENDS OF OUR INHERITANCE

Luke 12:13-21

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Dana Bjorlin

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." 14 But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." 16 Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' 18 Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' 20 But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

DIAGNOSIS: Foolish Excuses

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Excuses Around*

At first glance, this text seems to excuse many of us from involvement with it. With the economy in its present state, there may be no inheritance out there for us. As the hope of benefits from Social Security gets more tenuous, as healthcare

costs soar, as people's retirements are eaten up by stock market knavery and increased costs, who's likely to have an inheritance at all? Excuse us, Jesus, we need to think about our 401k's, 403b's, and IRA's, our futures, our-selves. Excuse us, we find it hard to identify with this character from the crowd.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *No Excuses!*

Lest we think that Jesus, himself is also making an excuse by saying he's not an arbitrator, he turns it around on the man, the crowd, and us. "Beware!" he says. "Make no excuses, but guard yourself against greed; (because) one's life (psyche is used throughout this reading both for life and for soul) does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (v. 15). The word translated as "greed" in our text can also mean coveting, or any insatiable desire for more. I once joked to my colleagues in our hospital's pastoral care department how we Lutherans (along with Roman Catholics) make a most clever observation by devoting 2 of the 10 commandments to coveting. During a recent week in Ohio we've been disappointed to see basketball phenom, LeBron James, decide that he's got enough money but he claims to have a need for something more: gaining a championship ring! We human beings have an insatiable yearning within our psyches and souls for more, more, and more. With such a pervasive desire for more of anything and everything, there really are no excuses for our greed. Yet we still actually believe that life is somehow lacking if we are deprived of getting more. But the "more" that we seek isn't anywhere near being Jesus, or the riches he desires to give us.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Fools Abound!*

Such unrestrained desire for more is, like other violations of the commandments, idolatry plain and simple. It is relying on something or someone other than God for our well-being. It is foolish, and even more so, it is dangerous.

Doubtless, the farmer in Jesus' parable thought that he was simply following the wise advice of the preacher in Ecclesiastes 2:24: "There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil." But, he was a fool, for he had not considered other observations of the preacher. "I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me-and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish?" (2:18-19a). The farmer forgot that God gives to the sinner "the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God" (2:26b), and that "what happens to the fool will happen to me also" (2:15). To forget God's power over death is to forget the God who judges all and who condemns all those who depend on and follow someone/something besides God's very self. You fool indeed! Your life-the totality of your existence-is required of you.

PROGNOSIS: Dividends of Our Inheritance

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Teacher Our Brother*

Unwittingly, the person from the crowd had called Jesus "Teacher," assuming him to be no more than a well-trained scribe applying the traditions of Moses. What he fails to comprehend is that Jesus is greater than Moses the lawgiver, and greater than Solomon the teacher of wisdom (Luke 11:31). In fact, Jesus is really the only one deserving the title of Teacher-The Teacher without limit and beyond compare. He doesn't only talk about God's will or God's wisdom-he embodies them. Unlike the rich fool, Jesus considered himself accountable to his Heavenly Father. In coming to the earth he gave up his heavenly abundance so that he might gain safety and security for all of God's children. On the cross, Jesus gives up his life-the totality of his existence-so that we might regain our real lives. In going to the cross and grave, Jesus releases the inheritance the Father had given to him in order that he might give it to God's

other children, including us – those whom he is not ashamed to call his brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:11). His resurrection offers the certainty that Jesus' inheritance is now our own.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Exceeding Abundance*

Having received a heavenly inheritance, we realize how exceedingly rich such wealth is. We have more than we could ever have imagined! We have no need to acquire extra for ourselves. Our gracious Brother has shared the family's treasures with us. We have an excess of everything, especially the security that comes from being called daughters and sons of the Heavenly Father, brothers and sisters of our Resurrected Lord. We need no more!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Ample Dividends Shared All Around*

Once life has been rescued from an attitude of scarcity and given an attitude of plenty instead, all kinds of new possibilities open up. We can be rich toward God in all that such richness means. We're no longer self-centered and fear-focused. We don't need to find excuses when we hear our flaws or frailties challenged. Seeing that there are ample resources around, we dare to be generous with others around us-financially as well as personally. Having seen the excess we have received through Jesus, we note all the surpluses we can share, all our dividends to dispose of. We now spend our lives delightfully dividing with others what we ourselves have received from God: love, forgiveness, self-respect and self-esteem, a place at the banquet table of heaven. Yet in dividing these dividends we never wind up with less. Becoming aware that we truly are sisters and brothers of the Lord Jesus, we encourage others all around us to delight in the bounty of being part of his family.