

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

GETTING MORE THAN WE'RE DUE

Luke 12:13-21

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Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

13Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." 14But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15And 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." 16Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' 18Then 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. 19And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' 20But 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?' 21So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

DIAGNOSIS: Getting Our Just Due

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Wanting More*

The pericope for this Sunday involves Jesus being dragged into a family dispute over an inheritance. Jesus addresses the dispute with a parable about the dangers of being satisfied by the priorities of wealth. Enough, Jesus seems to diagnose, is never

enough for us; instead, we imagine, more is always better. Not so, says Jesus.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Expecting Little from Jesus*

By this point in Jesus' public ministry, it seems that he has proved so useful that people are willing to ask him any number of favors: So it is that a man demands from the crowd, "Tell my brother to divide the family inheritance" (v. 13). Jesus, surprised that something so petty is being asked of him, simply inquires, "Who made me your judge or arbitrator?" (v. 14). Jesus may refuse the role of arbitrator in family rivalries, but that doesn't mean he remains silent; he is more than willing to point out the poverty of those who treasure wealth to the neglect of God. His unasked-for counsel reveals a deeper problem: call it greed, if you'd like to keep it simple, but "unfortunate allegiance" might be the better theological label for it. Jesus' parable on the inheritance dispute exposes the issue fully: A rich man accumulates a wealth of crops, and asks his own soul to affirm his desire to have it all. But his soul is not responsible for judging him, God is.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Spiritually Bankrupt*

And God refuses to affirm any man's self-satisfied seeking; instead, God condemns it: "Your life is being demanded of you" (v. 20). Those who treasure earthly goods over life with God are left impoverished in the end. Not only impoverished, but spiritually bankrupt. Godless. Life is required from those who are not rich toward God. So much for the embittered brother; so much for the rich farmer; so much for us. So this is our "just due"?!

PROGNOSIS: Getting More than What We're Due

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Receiving the Brother's Inheritance*

For those who are spiritually bankrupt, the only bit of good news that could possibly change these dire circumstances is the arrival of an unexpected good fortune—say, an unexpected inheritance. And that is exactly what is provided by the Father through Jesus. Jesus is no mere teacher or arbitrator, he is the Father's Son. He is the first born with the birthright. But more than that, he is the Son who stores his treasure up in God and not in the world's treasures—so much so, that he surrenders his life to the cause. Jesus accepts the full-blown poverty of death; he has nothing to show for himself; no treasure laid up on earth (v. 21). And his heavenly Father responds to that self-surrender with: "Rich!" Jesus gives away his earthly life and gets what you can take with you: the wealth of life with God. While it is true that Jesus' life was demanded of him, it is also true that, because he was rich toward God, his death was vanquished. What's more, his resurrection made him the heir and rightful administrator of that inheritance. Our relationship to Jesus, the Heir, can be summed up this way: We are the undeserving beneficiaries of our Brother's inheritance, which he is eager to share.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Expecting More with Jesus*

Such generosity on Christ's part, makes us do a double take, when it comes to what we ask of him: This is no mere teacher; this is no dime-a-dozen arbitrator. We have come into the company of Jesus the Christ, who administers the family fortune of mercy. And there's no need to fight over which of us is more deserving of the riches; in faith we know the inheritance is unearned by all, and always will be. We are simply beggars who have come into the company of a generous God; to which we can only say, "Rich!" Such undeserved well-fare merits our most sincere, "Thank God!"

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Wanting More than*

More

The priorities of those who inherit God's rich mercy are bound to shift. Worldly riches may have their purpose, but being rich toward God comes with its own benefits: In faith we know that our security doesn't depend on storing up worldly goods, so our lust for more ebbs. Of course, worldly goods can be used to care for ourselves, our loved ones and, very importantly, the poor. We all need daily food. But, unlike the world's goods, God's riches don't run out, and they satisfy long after the eating, drinking, and revelry have faded. Besides, we have more important things to spend our time on: Adopted into Christ's family, we are executors of our Brother's inheritance; we are called to divide the family fortune again and again, to benefit even more undeserving (but pleasantly surprised) souls.