

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, August 4, 2019

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

An Inheritance, a Rich Fool, and Jesus[Luke 12:13–21](#)

(Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12–14; 2:18–26; Colossians 3:1–11)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

Jesus said, “TAKE CARE, AND BE ON YOUR GUARD AGAINST ALL COVETOUSNESS, FOR ONE’S LIFE DOESN’T CONSIST IN THE ABUNDANCE OF HIS POSSESSIONS” (v 15) and St. Paul wrote, “YOU HAVE DIED, AND YOUR LIFE IS HIDDEN WITH CHRIST IN GOD. CHRIST . . . IS YOUR LIFE” (Col 3:3–4).

Blind beggars ask Jesus for mercy. Family and friends of sick people ask Him for healing. Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes ask Him about the law. And then there’s this guy: SOMEONE IN THE CROWD SAID TO JESUS, “TEACHER, TELL MY BROTHER TO DIVIDE THE INHERITANCE WITH ME” (v 13). Oof! Still, I suppose it’s better than *not* bringing this to Jesus, right? I mean, at least this SOMEONE thinks that Jesus has important things to say about inheritances and property. And he’s not wrong—not exactly. Jesus *does* have something to say—He’s got a lot to say!—just not quite what this guy had in mind.

3.

Jesus SAID TO HIM, “MAN, WHO APPOINTED ME A JUDGE OR ARBITRATOR OVER YOU?” (v 14). And . . . you can hear the air being let out of SOMEONE’s balloon. There go the man’s hopes that Jesus will side with him. Turns out he won’t be going back to his brother, saying, “Hey, bro, guess what? *Jesus* said you have to share with me.” Jesus isn’t about to be dragged into this dispute over possessions. He’s not about to let His words become a tool of our desires. This bickering over things isn’t what Jesus has been APPOINTED for. His authority is for something else.

Now maybe the disciples had started sniggering when they heard SOMEONE’s request for Jesus to divide the inheritance. Maybe others in the crowd rolled their eyes or gave knowing looks, as if to say, “*We* would never ask Jesus something as stupid as that.” That would’ve been my reaction, at least on the inside. So Jesus SAID TO *THEM*—not just to SOMEONE but to everyone, “TAKE CARE, AND BE ON YOUR GUARD AGAINST ALL COVETOUSNESS, FOR ONE’S LIFE DOESN’T CONSIST IN THE

ABUNDANCE OF HIS POSSESSIONS” (v 15). That gets to the soul of the matter. Jesus isn’t APPOINTED to be JUDGE OR ARBITRATOR of inheritances but of souls. He cares way less about who gets your uncle’s property than He does about who gets your soul. Where your great-grandma’s dresser ends up is of far less importance than where you end up.

Possessions, material goods, and money — *stuff*—that’s what Jesus is talking about. He knows the hold *stuff* has on our lives. What should our proper attitude be toward our *stuff*? Does life consist of these things? What do our words and our actions say about us? Covetousness—the sinful attachment to things and the consuming desire for more—is a matter of the heart. It doesn’t care what your bank account looks like. It affects both rich and poor. Have we treated *stuff* as our god? Have we let *stuff* come between us and other people? Do we expect more *stuff* to make us secure, give us joy, rescue us from trouble? But I’ll tell you right now, *stuff* makes a terrible god. All our stuff breaks or rusts or gets lost or loses its shine. And what good is our stuff when death comes? I can’t help but hear Ebenezer Scrooge sitting in his counting house counting coins . . . ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine . . . enslaved to it, his life defined by what he has. TAKE CARE, Jesus says. BE ON YOUR GUARD AGAINST the covetousness of your own heart.

But if LIFE DOESN’T CONSIST IN THE ABUNDANCE OF one’s POSSESSIONS, of what *does* your life consist? It’s not your relationship with things but who you are in relation to God. After all, (1 Cor 4:7) WHAT DO YOU HAVE THAT YOU DIDN’T RECEIVE? Who gave you all your *stuff* and the means to get more? Doesn’t all of it ultimately come from God?

2.

Jesus drives this home with A PARABLE, the story of a rich fool: “THE LAND OF A RICH MAN, a man whom God had already blessed with great wealth—that LAND PRODUCED a large crop.” It makes you wonder—what’s a person who already has everything he needs going to do with more *stuff*? Will he give it away? Share it with others? No, of course not! “HE THOUGHT TO HIMSELF, ‘WHAT SHALL I DO, FOR I HAVE NOWHERE TO STORE MY CROPS?’ AND HE SAID, ‘I’LL DO THIS: I’LL TEAR DOWN MY BARNs AND BUILD LARGER ONES, add more space, rent a storage unit, AND THERE I’LL 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”” (vv 16–19). He thinks that he’s set for life. And I suppose, from the perspective of this world, as long as his life lasts, he is set. His present and future are secure, as far he can see.

But then he can't see all that far. He's so coiled in that he can't see anyone or anything else. All he sees is himself and his piles of *stuff*: WHAT SHALL I DO, FOR I HAVE . . . MY CROPS . . . I'LL DO . . . MY BARNES . . . MY GRAIN . . . MY GOODS. AND I WILL SAY TO MY SOUL. . . . He's the incarnation of selfishness. He thinks of no one else, consults no one else, works for the good of no one else—not for God or family or country. His things have become his life. He's possessed by all the stuff he possesses.

And then, something he didn't foresee—God! God enters the story. GOD SAID TO HIM, "FOOL! THIS NIGHT YOUR SOUL IS REQUIRED OF YOU, AND THE THINGS YOU HAVE PREPARED, WHOSE WILL THEY BE?" (v 20). What will happen to all your stuff? To your crops and your barns and your grain and your goods . . . and to your soul? VANITY! ALL IS VANITY AND A STRIVING AFTER WIND (Eccl 1:2, 14)! SO IS THE ONE WHO LAYS UP TREASURE FOR HIMSELF AND IS NOT RICH TOWARD GOD (v 21).

One remedy for worry and anxiety over wealth, one solution to obsessing over our things, is to give away your surplus. Fear and thank God for what He gives. Enjoy His gifts, especially with others. And freely give away what you don't need. That seems to be how the first Christians lived. THEY HAD ALL THINGS IN COMMON. AND THEY WERE SELLING THEIR POSSESSIONS AND BELONGINGS AND DISTRIBUTING THE PROCEEDS TO ALL, AS ANY HAD NEED (Acts 2:44–45).

1.

Of what, then, does your life consist? Of what did life consist for the first Christians? St. Paul reminds us today: CHRIST IS YOUR LIFE (Col 3:4). SOMEONE wanted half an inheritance on earth. The Lord offered him way more—a whole inheritance in heaven. FOR YOU KNOW THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THAT THOUGH HE WAS RICH, YET FOR YOUR SAKE HE BECAME POOR, SO THAT YOU BY HIS POVERTY MIGHT BECOME RICH (2 Cor 8:9). He set aside His inheritance. He left everything He had. In a sense, He burned His barns. He became nothing—for what? For you! That you might be His own and life under Him in His kingdom. To make you His treasured possession. Because your soul and body were worth more to Him than His own life.

His life was valued at thirty pieces of silver. That was the price set on his head. When Judas watched Jesus being led to the cross and counted out those coins, he saw what a fool he'd been. But he totally missed the foolishness of the cross. FOR THE WORD OF THE CROSS IS FOLLY TO THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING, BUT TO US WHO ARE BEING SAVED IT IS THE POWER OF GOD (1 Cor 1:18). You were purchased at the cost of His blood. How much is that? Beyond numbers—infinite! He came not as judge or

arbitrator. He was APPOINTED to be your Savior, the ONE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MEN, THE MAN CHRIST JESUS, WHO GAVE HIMSELF AS A RANSOM FOR ALL (1 Tim 2:5–6). His authority is not in dividing inheritances but in forgiving sin, our greed and covetousness included.

In Christ, you have more than ample goods laid up for many years. Through Christ, You have a heavenly Father who knows what you need and well provides (Lk 11:2). In Christ, You have the gift of DAILY BREAD from His hand (Lk 11:3). In Christ, You have THE WASHING OF REBIRTH AND RENEWAL BY THE HOLY SPIRIT (Titus 3:5). You have the forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation in His body and His blood. SEEK THE THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST IS, SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD. SET YOUR MINDS ON THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE, NOT ON THINGS THAT ARE ON EARTH. FOR YOU HAVE DIED, AND YOUR LIFE IS HIDDEN WITH CHRIST IN GOD (Col 3:1–3).

Christ is your life, and your life is hidden in Him. Already you are sons and daughters of the king. Already your future is secure. Don't be deceived. The abundance of your possessions can add nothing to what is already yours.

Today Jesus says:

“IF YOU WANT AN INHERITANCE, HAVE MINE!”

He came not just to *divide* His inheritance with you, but to *give* it to you. All of it! Like Solomon, He said, “I'm going to die and SOMEONE is going to get all of it” (Eccl 2:18) For Solomon, this was a lament, but for our Lord it was all joy. He meant *you*. Jesus died, and you inherit everything, even heaven. We'd be fools to turn that down! We'd be fools to cling to all our *stuff* when we've got Christ!

Hear, now, what God says to your soul: “Soul, RELAX, EAT, DRINK, BE MERRY, not because you've got it made in this world but because Christ is your life and His inheritance is yours and your soul belongs to Him, now and forever.”

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7
