

Year C Proper 18 Let Us Show the World How Very Rich We Are Luke 12 13 to 21

Jesus says, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

We hear the word, "greed" in there and it helps us to understand Jesus' reaction to the young man and why he refused to help with his request. In those days, the elder brother always got a "double portion" of the inheritance. In the case of two brothers then, the older brother would receive two-thirds while the younger brother got one-third. It is clearly the younger brother who approaches Jesus today and asks Jesus to compel his older brother to share the larger inheritance with him. The younger brother calls Jesus, "Rabbi" – teacher – indicating that Jesus, as with all rabbis at that time, did have the authority to make the decision on the younger brother's request.

Jesus refuses to do this and then turns to the crowd and warns them to be on guard against all kinds of greed. Jesus is telling the younger brother not to be greedy. Jesus could easily discern that the request for more of the inheritance was coming from a place of reliance upon material goods for personal satisfaction and happiness. In the story of the Prodigal Son, Luke shows us what we can presume of younger brothers who want their inheritance early. That younger brother wasted all of his money on food, drink, and women. Jesus is most certainly saving today's younger brother from falling into a similar trap.

Jesus then tells the crowd – and the younger brother – the story of the rich fool. What does all of this have to do with us though?

For a better understanding, we need a refresher on what comes before and after the story that we hear today. Here's a sample:

Jesus says to the people, “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

Then Jesus says, “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God.”

And immediately following the parable we just heard this morning, Jesus says to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear...It is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.”

Today, through story, Jesus is telling us that greed is a symptom of a much larger problem. Greed is like the runny nose when your whole body is aching with a cold or flu. The rich fool in our story shows us what this larger problem is.

A rich farmer has just experienced an abundant harvest and he is overjoyed. He decides to tear down his small barns and build larger barns in order to hold all of the grain he has acquired. This rich farmer is, indeed, a shrewd business man but his thinking is not thinking that belongs in the kingdom of God. His thinking is mirrored around the globe by every successful company and wealthy business person or investor...take the abundance you have and save it. Jay has a friend named Dave who is an investor and money manager. Dave struggles with the clash between his Christian values – the values of the kingdom – and with being the one who invests the money for his wealthy clients. Why is this a struggle? Because Dave knows that much of the world’s wealth is being removed from

circulation. His wealthy clients – and many others around the world – are investing money to make more money. Huge amounts of money are doing nothing but driving the fortunes of the upper 1% of society.

The pressure is increasing for people at all income levels to take on that same mentality...use money to make more money. You may be familiar with this commercial catch phrase: “Don’t get mad, get Etrade.” For those of us who really don’t have the money to spare to put a lot away in investments, we are exposed to the additional pressure to get more money. Lottery commercials, gambling sites, and betting sites are relentlessly pushing their “quick fix” avenue for more money.

There is nothing inherently wrong with wealth so what *is* wrong with all of this? The rich farmer in the story was securing his wealth and status in his community by hoarding the grain but the people around him suffer because of his decision. Rather than allowing his grain to enter into the economy through the market, everyone must come to one person for their grain – if he’ll sell it to them. He can demand whatever price he wants. He has the market cornered as the saying goes. This should sound familiar. We live in a society that gravitates toward this way of thinking. Larger corporations but fewer corporations provide services to the general population. Big companies, Walmart, for example, came to Canada and swallowed up many local businesses who simply could not compete. And even large companies like Sears couldn’t compete with the even larger online companies like Amazon. Care for others is not a part of the business world.

We all participate in this mentality at least a little bit – often without an awareness of it. Back in the ‘90’s, Harper’s Index compared the salary of

basketball superstar Michael Jordan with that of a typical factory worker in Indonesia who makes the shoes Michael Jordan endorses. The number of years it would take for that factory worker making the Nike shoes to earn the money that Michael Jordan makes simply for letting his name be associated with those shoes is 44, 492 years¹. I like to think Michael Jordan would be horrified to hear that statistic. Are Canadian CEO's horrified to know they earn 200 times more than their average worker? The average CEO, by 11am, will have earned in less than one day of work what the average employee will earn for the entire year.² A Canadian CEO is compensated over \$10 million each year. More than half of that comes from the people investing in their company's shares. Are we horrified to know that, in Canada, it is estimated that, on any given night, over 35000 people will be sleeping on the street?

My point is that the rich farmer's thinking – keep what I have in order to feel secure and important – always comes at the expense of others. It started as an individual way of thinking. It became a corporate, systemic way of thinking. This thinking created social and economic classes and all of society's problems that go along with that. We live in a time where it feels impossible to undo all of this. It will be a monumental task to eliminate inequalities and injustices, to level the playing field, so to speak. But the brokenness is being undone – the hills are being made low and the valleys are being lifted up – and we, as the Church, are a part of that undoing.

Our ACWs work hard every year to raise money – with teas, bake sales, yard sales, and so on – and they give this money to those who do not have what we have.

¹ Article in *The State* (newspaper), Columbia, S.C., August 18, 1992.

² [Canada's top CEOs earn 200 times an average worker's salary: report | CBC News](#)

This selfless giving is part of their make-up, it's in their constitution. The ACW is one part of the Church. The Church, as a whole, also follows this way of operating. This is why every individual church is a registered charity. We are to share all that we have with those who need it. We operate against the prevalent thinking of society – the prevalent thinking that is to care for our own needs first and then perhaps give a little to others. We are to think a different way for we are Christ to this broken, unequal, unjust world and Christ, himself, today tells us why we do what we do, why we are who we are.

The rich farmer in today's story never understood that God was the ultimate source of his abundance. He did not understand that the relationships with his farm labourers also contributed to his abundance. Was he aware that relationships at home provide the love and support in his life enabling him to thrive? And, lastly, "as he surveyed his vast farmland, did he delight in the handiwork of God in water, soil, and seed?" (Augsberg Sermons 3, p.183). There is a prayer used regularly at Night Prayer which says, "grant that we may never forget that our common life depends upon each other's toil". Our common life ultimately flows from God – all that we are and all that we have is God's. We forget that when we base our feelings of security on the material things we acquire. Such was the mistake of the rich farmer. He relied on himself and on the world around him, forgetting about God.

God calls this farmer a fool because he has assumed that his security and happiness comes from his possessions and his wealth rather than from God, from whom all things come. His riches didn't help him one bit when he died and left everything behind. Jesus tells us, "So it is with those who store up treasures for

themselves but are not rich toward God.” Jesus goes on to explain that those rich toward God are those who trust God to provide all that they need. “Seek first God’s kingdom” he tells his disciples. Living in God’s kingdom means loving as God loves, forgiving as God forgives, and being abundantly generous to all in need as God is abundantly generous with us. Trust God to provide enough so that we can share all we have with those in need. This is being rich toward God.

The greed of the rich farmer is the opposite of the abundant generosity of God. Greed cultivates the worry that prevents us from being generous as God is generous, prevents us from truly living in God’s kingdom. “Greed” maybe sounds like too harsh a word with which to label ourselves but Paul’s thinking will help. Greed, according to Paul, is idolatry: The worship of things other than God – placing our hopes and our reliance, our happiness and security on stuff rather than on God by whom they are given to us.

Psalm 49 drives home the point Jesus makes:

Hear this, all you peoples;
 listen, all who live in this world,
 both low and high,
 rich and poor alike...

Why should I fear when evil days come,
 when wicked deceivers surround me—
 those who trust in their wealth
 and boast of their great riches?
 No one can redeem the life of another
 or give to God a ransom for them—
 the ransom for a life is costly,
 no payment is ever enough—
 so that they should live on forever
 and not see decay.

For all can see that the wise die,
that the foolish and the senseless also perish,
leaving their wealth to others.

Their tombs will remain their houses forever,
their dwellings for endless generations,
though they had named lands after themselves.

People, despite their wealth, do not endure;
they are like the beasts that perish.

This is the fate of those who trust in themselves,
and of their followers, who approve their sayings...

Their forms will decay in the grave,
far from their princely mansions.

But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead;
he will surely take me to himself.

Do not be overawed when others grow rich,
when the splendor of their houses increases;
for they will take nothing with them when they die,
their splendor will not descend with them.

Though while they live they count themselves blessed—
and people praise you when you prosper—
they will join those who have gone before them,
who will never again see the light of life.

People who have wealth but lack understanding
are like the beasts that perish.

Jesus provides the understanding we need. “One’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions,” he says. We live in God’s kingdom. Let us show the world how very rich we are.