

Laying up treasures in heaven

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Eighth Sunday after Pentecost) is Luke 12:13-21. Someone in the crowd asks Jesus to mediate a family dispute. People often brought such problems to respected rabbis.

The man wanted someone to divide the property between himself and his brother, with whom he had a dispute, whereas Jesus comes as one who reconciles so that all might be brothers and neighbors at peace.

This first general principle warns against the antonym of the proper attitude toward possessions: greed. Greed is an obsession to hoard all things for oneself, blocking out any thought for God or for one's neighbor.

In John 10:10 Jesus says he has come so that we may have life abundantly. Abundance of life is not found in having many possessions, but in having Christ.

The rich man of Jesus' parable was reasoning or debating with himself. He had a number of options including giving the Lord or to the poor. Note use of "I" and my in this verse. He totally fails to see that this is a blessing from the Lord. So, he builds more barns and keeps it for himself. This reveals the man's heart.

Eating, drinking and being merry are not sinful acts in themselves, but here they represent misplaced priorities and values. (TLSB)

God, however, has the last word. But before he can rest in his self-pronounced security, the Giver of every good and perfect gift speaks to him. Uninvited, God now enters the dialog and shows that greed, like hypocrisy, leads to death: "Fool, on this very night your soul is demanded back from you [by me]. But the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (12:20). This rich fool did not recognize that the gift of surplus goods was from God. He should not be surprised—but he is—that his very life is also a gift from God and that this gift may be "demanded back" by God at any time. He was so concerned with gaining the whole world that he loses himself and suffers loss (9:25). In this case, he loses his own soul. This is why he is a fool, because the possessions that possessed him during his life are now meaningless when that life is demanded back by God.

To be rich toward God is first of all to believe in Jesus and to trust in the riches he has earned for us in his death on the cross. Then we bring forth fruit of our faith, using our possession for the glory of God and in service of our neighbor.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, keep my eyes from becoming envious and my heart from self-destructive greed. Move me to find satisfaction in your promises and to trust that you will more than provide for me and my loved ones. Amen. (TLSB)