

Preacher: Pastor Twyla
Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

¹³ Someone out of the crowd said, "Teacher, order my brother to give me a fair share of the family inheritance." ¹⁴ He replied, "Mister, what makes you think it's any of my business to be a judge or mediator for you?" ¹⁵ Speaking to the people, he went on, "Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot." ¹⁶ Then he told them this story: "The farm of a certain rich man produced a terrific crop. ¹⁷ He talked to himself: 'What can I do? My barn isn't big enough for this harvest.' ¹⁸ Then he said, 'Here's what I'll do: I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll gather in all my grain and goods, ¹⁹ and I'll say to myself, Self, you've done well! You've got it made and can now retire. Take it easy and have the time of your life!' ²⁰ "Just then God showed up and said, 'Fool! Tonight, you die. And your barnful of goods—who gets it?' ²¹ "That's what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God."

In 1982, "ABC Evening News" reported on an unusual work of modern art--a chair affixed to a shotgun. It was to be viewed by sitting in the chair and looking directly into the gun barrel. The gun was loaded and set on a timer to fire at an undetermined moment within the next hundred years. The amazing thing was that people waited in lines to sit and stare into the shell's path! They all knew the gun could go off at point-blank range at any moment, but they were gambling that the fatal blast wouldn't happen during THEIR minute in the chair.

Yes, it was foolhardy, yet many people who wouldn't dream of sitting in that chair live a lifetime gambling that they can get away with sin. Foolishly they ignore the risk until the inevitable self-destruction. This is a situation Jesus encountered again and again with people who came to him for advice. I believe he still encounters people, perhaps many people who have the same problem.

Our story begins with a young man bringing a grievance to Jesus, expecting Jesus to side with him so that he can get what he wants. It was a common practice to take unresolvable problems to a rabbi for help. So, coming to Jesus with this kind of a problem would not have surprised those gathered around him.

The young man explained his problem as his brother being unfair to him with the disbursement of the family inheritance. However, "the laws of inheritance" at that time, "stipulated that the elder brother would receive a double portion of the inheritance. Apparently, the younger brother did not feel that was fair. He wanted more of the inheritance.

As we read, Jesus wanted no parts of being the judge or mediator for this issue. Of course, Jesus knew the laws, so we might think that Jesus's refusal to get involved was because he did not want to break the law. But because Jesus did not drop the matter and walk away, we know that there was more to his reason for staying out of the controversy. Jesus rejected the role of judge or decider because he did not want to have any parts of helping the man satisfy his greed.

Through the telling of the parable that followed, Jesus exposed the young man's true thoughts and desires. Jesus knew this was not a request driven by fairness, this was a request soaked in greed and selfishness. Fairness and greed do not mix. Quite frankly, greed does not mix well with anything that is good.

It works that way sometimes when we take our problems to God. Our requests to God may have underlying motivations that we may or may not be aware of; but God, who knows everything, even the things about ourselves that we do not know, exposes what is really going on in our hearts. When that happens, hopefully we learn from that and change.

Through the parable, Jesus also warned the young man that his possessions did not define who he was. The rich man in the parable realized his harvest was much more than he expected, it was in fact

much more than he needed. But it never crossed his mind that he could give some away. "The man has shut out everyone else from his life and his thoughts."

Like the farmer in the parable, it was greed and selfishness for more wealth that would create the person the young man would be to others. His actions or lack thereof and his words would be influenced, even formed by his greed and selfishness. That's not the kind of man he was created by God to be.

A woman tending the nursery at church watched as a little boy sat on the floor with a red rubber ball in each arm and three Nerf balls clenched on the floor between his pudgy little knees. He was trying to protect all five of the other children in the nursery. The problem was, he could not hold all five at once, and the ball nearest to his feet was particularly vulnerable of being stolen. So, whenever another child showed an interest in playing with one of the balls, the little boy snarled to make it clear these toys were not for sharing.

The woman thought about stepping in to make the little guy give up one or two of the balls, but she was too wrapped up in the drama. For about five minutes this little guy growled, postured, and kept the other children away from the balls. Like a hyena hunched over the last scraps of a carcass, this snarling little canine was not in the mood for sharing. The other kids circled like vultures around the kill, looking for a way to jump in and snatch a ball without being attacked and bitten. The woman did not know whether to laugh or cry as she watched.

Then it struck her: this little boy was not having any fun. There was no cheer within ten yards of this kid. Not only was he unhappy, but all the other kids seemed sad as well. His selfishness created a black hole that sucked all of the joy out of that nursery. When church was over and his parents came to pick him up, he left the balls behind. And that was the end of that.

Receiving a larger portion of the inheritance was not going to make the young man happy and Jesus knew it. More than likely, the man would lose his self to greed and selfishness, and never really feel satisfied. Jesus warns us several times in scripture about the risk of losing our selves, to what turns out to be worthless, meaningless, and unfulfilling. For example, we can read what Jesus said earlier in Luke 9:25 "One may gain the whole world and lose one's soul" (9:25). On the other hand, we know we are on the right track when we adhere to what Jesus taught in Luke 8:21 and 11:28, "True blessing comes to those who hear the Word of God and do it." If we are going to lose ourselves, we should lose our selves in Jesus, in the Word, in our Holy Creator.

What defines who you are? One of the first things people often ask each other when they meet for the first time or after not seeing each other for a long time is, "What do or what did you do? Do jobs and careers define who we are? Does wealth define who you are? Do issues define who you are?"

This parable should not limit our thinking about how our greed for possessions and wealth can ruin our relationship with God and others; but it is also possible that we allow other things define who we are with the same results. Whatever takes our attention and reason for being away from God and God's will, defines us as someone other than a Christian.

For example, take issues, people can become so very passionate about some issues, abortion, homosexuality, gun control, that their passionate reactions to these issues define who they are. They may believe their passion is driven by their faithfulness to God and God's Word. That may be where it started, but for some people the motivation becomes pride to be right or pride to feel superior in knowledge of God and the Word.

Pride is also one of those characteristics that can get people into a lot of trouble. Pride brings out the worst in some people. They might speak angry, hurtful words that may push people away from them, and turn people off to Jesus, who is the very one they profess to have faith in. Their actions may not come close to reflecting God's love to those they oppose, and we all should know that breaking the commandment to love our neighbors, our enemies, all people, gets us in a heap of trouble with God. For goodness sake, even Jesus had compassion and love for those who believed they were doing the right thing by crucifying him. He asked God to forgive them. What are people thinking when they think they

can treat those they oppose, people who have differing opinions and beliefs, with anything less than love? It's not a bad thing to stand up for what we believe, but our motivation needs to be love not pride.

I gotta say that this one really gets to me because I have seen far too many people get hurt and pushed away from the church and God because of selfishness and pride. I've heard of congregations torn apart not necessarily because of the issue up for debate, but because of the unloving things that were said. And I watch my own denomination split. I don't think that's exactly what God has in mind for his church.

I want to point out one more attitude that defines some people and that is negativity. Have you ever known someone who is negative about everything? They usually are not much fun to be around. If Jesus were to expose what is inside of them that drives their negativity, I think he might reveal some unresolved hurt or anger.

Can you see how this parable teaches us more than the fact that greed and selfishness are not attitudes we want to have? The story exposes our own inner commitments as clearly as it exposes the thoughts of the rich fool. It holds up a mirror before us and asks us to take a good look at our own inner lives and listen to our own inner voices." We need to beware of any attitude that takes over our hearts and takes precedence over God and others.

There is something else Jesus revealed about the heart of the young man who came to him. Remember that the farmer in the parable was planning to take matters into his own hands by building more and bigger barns for his harvest to ensure himself of a comfortable lifestyle in the future instead of giving to others in need? It is through this part of the story that Jesus exposed the man's insecurities about his own future. He was fearful of trusting God with his life and his future. In the end, Jesus told him, he would have nothing, nothing earthly, and nothing heavenly.

At least twelve American multimillionaires are looking forward to life beyond death. Confident in the progress of modern medicine, they have arranged for their bodies to be frozen after they have died. They also have set up "personal revival trusts," which are designed to ensure their present wealth will be waiting for them when they have been resuscitated one hundred or two hundred years in the future.

David Pizer, sixty-four years old, figured that the "roughly \$10 million" he left to himself – after all the compounded interest has been added – will make him "the richest man in the world" when he wakes up.

Jesus tells us that those who confess him as their Savior, look to God for defining themselves and for their security, not to their own ability to create themselves or accumulate possessions and lay up wealth for the future. God holds the vision for our future. Jesus points the way to God. He exposes those attitudes and insecurities that cause us to rely on and trust only the things of this world and ourselves. May God always be your focus and your security for today and for your future. Amen.