

Sermon
 08-03-2025
 Colossians 3:1-11
 Luke 12:13-21

Some of you may know of the work of Edwin Friedman. He wrote several influential works about family systems. And he is famous for this statement: "Money is always about more than money."

Our spending, our saving, and our general attitudes toward material wealth are all invested with emotions and memories. And how we deal with money matters reveals much about our heart (paraphrase from Patricia L Lull, *Feasting on the Word*, p 312).

If you are not familiar with the quote from Friedman, Matthew will be more familiar.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matt 6:21

The Gospel of Luke also speaks of wealth, but in this passage, and we do so in today's passage.

Today's passage from Luke is somewhat comical. Comical in a rather irritating way. Jesus is out and about doing his ministry thing, and some guy interrupts him, probably while Jesus is mid-conversation, and mid-thought.

"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Now this demand is strange, right? There is no way that, given the focus of Jesus' ministry, Jesus is talking about money management and inheritance laws.

Jesus says, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" Jesus' remark sounds as if it is tinged with a bit of frustration, perhaps that is partly due to the awkwardness of this question.

But his response is really important. And I think it often gets short shrift in discussion. We tend to move on to the lessons of Do not focus on material gain. Lifetimes are limited, and You can't take it with you.

These are all good themes for discussion, and we can do that the next time this reading comes around on the Liturgical calendar. But today I want to look at this statement by Jesus, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?"

I want to see this statement as a call out by Jesus for taking personal responsibility for that which claims our attention. When we look at what takes our attention throughout each day or over our lifetimes, what has been our goal?

So, keep this question in mind as we look at today's passage. What are our responsibilities in our relationship with God? Or what are we being called to take responsibility for?

In response to the question from the man in the crowd, Jesus tells a parable.

It is a story of a self-absorbed fellow. We might say in modern language that he is a bit tone deaf. This wealthy man has been blessed with a bountiful harvest and is bemoaning the fact that he has nowhere to store his crops, given the remarkable amount of riches he has been given.

His solution is to tear down his barn and build a larger one. And then he will languish away his days; he will eat, drink, and be merry. There are a lot of I, me, and my " in this fellow's self-oriented goal.

There is not a lot of gratitude for his blessings. His attitude suggests that he believes he is the maker of his good fortune, he deserves a reward for his efforts, and he will determine the reward.

Summary: The man in our parable in the center of his world, his goals are the center of his aspirations, his reward is received without gratitude, rather from a place of privilege. There is no love shown for God, nor for anyone in his life.

In the parable, God speaks and chastises this misdirected fellow, reminding him that in the end, for all his attained wealth and self-centered rewards, he will have nothing. He has not shown gratitude for his blessings, and most importantly, he has not shown love.

His focus has taken him away from loving God. And by failing to love God, he has not loved God's people.

So whose responsibility was it to alter this man's life? Whose responsibility was it to make this self-centered man a better man? Was it God's? Or was the responsibility to be a God-fearing, God-loving man, this man's responsibility?

Throughout history, we have blamed the ills of the world on God. Everything from famine, war, disease, and even death on God.

We all know the joke about receiving help from God.

A storm descends on a small town, and the downpour soon turns into a flood. As the waters rise, a man climbs on his roof and prays to God to help him.

By and by, one of the townsfolk comes up the street in a canoe.

"Better get in, he calls to the man. The waters are rising fast."

"No," says the man. "I have faith in the Lord. He will save me."

Still the waters rise. Now the man is up on the balcony, wringing his hands in supplication, when another guy zips up in a motorboat.

"Come on, he calls out. We need to get you out of here. The levee's gonna break any minute."

Once again, the man is unmoved. "I shall remain. The Lord will see me through."

After a while the levee breaks, and the flood rushes up to the edge of the roof. The man remains is up there, clinging to the roof, when a helicopter descends out of the clouds, and a state trooper calls down to him through a megaphone.

"Grab the ladder, he calls out This is your last chance."

Once again, the man insists the Lord will deliver him.

And, predictably, he drowns.

A pious man goes to heaven. After a while, he gets an interview with God, and he asks the Almighty, "Lord, I had unwavering faith in you. Why didn't you deliver me from that flood?"

God shakes his head. "What did you want from me? I sent you two boats and a helicopter."

God gave this drowning man everything he needed, but the drowning man did not engage in his part of the rescue. He failed to see God. He failed to see his relationship with God.

In this parable today, Jesus once again explains our relationship with God. He shows us where and how we take responsibility for using the gifts that God has given us.

And also, really importantly, and we see this in the Letter to the Corinthians, we must remember that God has given us the gift of restraint. How much of the world's ills are due to the lack of restraint by humankind?

Yes, there are famines, some caused by natural disasters, but many are caused by human greed. In both cases, we have the power to use our gifts from God to feed starving people.

Yes, there are wars. But we have the intellectual powers and the loving hearts given to us by God that have the power to prevent war.

We have the intellectual curiosity and financial resources to design research and treatments for disease.

We choose to turn from God's gifts. God has given us the capacity to see material needs as part of our lives, but not the center of the Christian life.

The last bit of our parable reminds us that our earthly life will end. “The things which you have prepared-whose will they be?” Now, for Jesus, death is not a tragedy. Jesus knows of eternal life and has offered it to us.

So, more likely, he is urging his listeners to lead a meaningful life, one that puts God at the center of our lives. A meaningful life is a life lived with God, and for God. May you be so blessed.

Amen