

Sermon on **Luke 12:13-21** for 11th Sunday after Pentecost
8.25.19 - St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

No Fool Focus for the Christian.

Keep your focus. Today we meet a man consumed by his own trouble. Jesus taught a crowd of his disciples and many thousands. He told them to watch out for the yeast and hypocrisy of the Pharisees who only concerned themselves with outward performance and never the inward state of affairs with God. Jesus taught the crowd of God's care and concern for all of them. Jesus told them to not be afraid to confess him wherever you are. Maybe Jesus paused for a bit, or he was about to teach something else. A man stepped forward and said, *"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."*

Was this man paying attention to what Jesus taught at all? Before we get too judgmental, to be honest, it is not abnormal for us to be consumed in our own minds with a question or concern that keeps us from focusing on what is being taught. This is a demand even, "Jesus, you look like a person people respect. Talk some sense into my dumb brother who is cheating me out of my inheritance." It didn't go well for Martha when she told Jesus to command her sister Mary to get to work. Jesus in love confronted the problem in Martha's heart. This day, Jesus did not come to be the next "Judge Judy." He came to save the world. Jesus in love confronts the problem in this man's heart, and today, also in ours.

"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." Jesus was among them publicly preaching for three years. High School and College freshmen, you have 4 + years ahead of you. Only three years with Jesus and an inheritance dispute is all this man could think about. Our sinful natures and the devil himself aim to draw us away from Jesus and his complete rescue for sinners, the message of his grace. They work on us slowly through a reprioritization of focus. A slight deviation in our focus can have huge consequences down the road if it stays on that trajectory. We are bombarded with commercials and ads for this product, or that car, camper, or cell phone, this drug, relationship or cause that will bring me happiness, relief, or status. With all the extra time I'll save, or family time, or fill in the blank, these offers make it sound like a no-brainer. We prioritize these offers only to realize later what that they don't add up and can't. Only Jesus does. Ok, man in the crowd with this demand, what if you got the inheritance or for that matter were rich but sadly with that same sin in your heart, what then? *Watch out!*

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." It's not wrong to own nice barns or to have a lot of possessions and money. Many of the patriarchs were very rich and powerful. I could point to many Christians, even Welsers, even members whom God has richly blessed monetarily beyond the ordinary. It's not wrong to enjoy the good things God gives with a thankful heart. This man identified a problem – "my barns are too small to hold my harvest." We don't feel sorry for him about this. But we do feel sorry for him, that he did not identify the problem. It wasn't in the building and materials or the timing of the business. It was his heart – greed.

Jesus paints a picture of a man whose heart had turned away from God and his love and turned toward the things God had given him and his love for them. Jesus doesn't say anything bad about his business practices – probably was an honest landowner, probably paid his workers well, a respected and envied man in the community. But his heart – maybe the words jumped off the page, "What shall I do? I have, my crops, I'll do, I will tear down, build bigger, I will store my surplus." It's a prideful and greed-filled heart focused on the good gifts rather than on the giver – God.

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God." Jesus doesn't name the man in the parable. Jesus doesn't tell us who the 'someone' in the crowd is. So, what name to we put on the name plate under the picture Jesus

paints for us? The brother who felt cheated and was consumed by getting that inheritance could certainly put his name on the plate. Losing your focus on Christ always ends badly, and for the rich man in the parable, he lost his soul. And the riches? *“Who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” “your life will be demanded from you.”* Riches are a fool focus.

Is my name there? What about your name? Does my contentment level or my happiness meter fluctuate because of what is in my wallet or account or what isn't, because of what is in my garage or what isn't, because of what is in my pocket or what isn't, because of who I'm with or who I'm not with? The honest answer is yes, it does – more than it should. I'm the man sitting there thinking of my problems with that greedy glint in my eye and about how to keep the piles of money I've been given patting myself on the back because it's mine and I earned it, or I'm sitting there worrying and wringing my hands because it seems only pennies are in my pocket and I can't afford what I want. If only I had that inheritance. Greed and Pride find their way to the table in my heart and kick their feet up.

The point of Jesus' parable is not to pat you on the back with how you never get led astray by greed or covetousness. The point of Jesus' parable is that you and I, like that someone who asked the question, desperately need to *“watch out”* because that greed and pride regularly turn our eyes to finding happiness in possessions or fear because of our lack. What did the real man do? Did he huff off? Did he go away sad or turn away from following Jesus like others? Did he learn from it like Martha? We don't know. But maybe that's the point. How will you go away from this encounter with Jesus?

Jesus is focused on you. *“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”* Where is our focus? Where are our riches? Jesus forces us sinner-saints to examine our lives and practices and then to look to him. Jesus keeps his focus on you. Jesus gave up the perfect praise of angels and saints in heaven to take on flesh and meet Joseph who probably had a look of panic in his eyes helping Mary give birth, to have a few mangy shepherds come straight in from the field to worship him. Jesus gave up the riches of heaven to be subject to great need and weakness as he fasted and was tempted in the wilderness, as he had to depend solely on his heavenly Father and His Word. Jesus gave up the Father's house and mansions to have no place to lay his head during his earthly ministry. He let no greed or pride come to the table of his heart, a table set only for his father and for a world of sinners he loved. His thoughts were not on his personal interests for this life, but to earn eternal life for all. The afternoon he died, there was no wrangling with God to stay a little longer. His few earthly possessions were gambled over and taken from him. But that's not where his riches were. He counted you his riches to his Father's glory. He took your names off the name plate of that condemned sinner and put his own. He had suffered for all our names, names that were on that plate under the picture of the greedy and worried man. Jesus willingly gave up his spirit, committing it to his Father in heaven. He gave up all so that you and I would be richer in all the ways that matter. All for you. All for your forgiveness. All so you look up from your worry or your pride and greed and turn from that fool focus and look to your Savior.

Jesus has rescued you. He rose and his promises are true. You are forgiven. You are God's child. Now how can I be rich toward God? How can I serve him better, live for him, remain close to him all my days? How can I better give my time to his Word and work? How can I better understand my role as a steward of all the things he gives me rather than a miser who looks only how I can please myself with my riches? How can I use my talents better in ways that please God whether at home, school, work or church? How do I pass this on to the next generation?

Keep your eyes focused on your Savior Jesus. Listen to him. Listen to his Word regularly and often here at God's house, at home, and with fellow believers. Less streaming or scrolling, more Scripture. Less self-help and more study of saved sinners serving others to God's glory. You are rich in your Savior Jesus; richer than any riches this world can offer. As the Lord blesses you in this life, do not turn your focus and love to the riches. Keep your eyes focused on your Savior and being rich in him and toward him in all you do, in how you live, in your love for him and your neighbor. Why? Because you are rich in Jesus and you know it. Keep your focus on Jesus. Amen.