

“Court TV”

Luke 12:13-21

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I have to believe Judge Judy would love these two boys and find their dispute a good fit for her television show. Brothers arguing over an inheritance would produce the drama that Judge Judy could use to keep people’s attention and her ratings up.

I don’t know if you are a fan of Court TV, but obviously many people are due to the growing number of judges presiding over small claims court on television. When I am tired of listening to politicians bash one another as the election kicks into high gear, I settle into a case on Court TV and watch the drama unfold.

In today’s text, a disgruntled brother interrupted Jesus while he was teaching, demanding that Jesus make his brother open the purse strings. To his surprise, Jesus refused to be drawn into this dispute, choosing instead to talk about the broader topic of stewardship and the dangers of greed.

He told a parable that clearly drove his point home. Let me share it with you again.

“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.” ’

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.” (Luke 12:16-21)

Let’s analyze this story by asking some probing questions.

Why did this man interrupt Jesus while he was teaching? Could this have not waited until after Jesus concluded his lesson? Yes, but for some reason he barged in and blurted out what he wanted Jesus to do.

Perhaps he had just argued with his brother and was so upset he didn’t care that he was interrupting Jesus. Maybe he wanted the crowd to hear his complaint, thinking this might shame his brother into sharing the inheritance.

Whatever his reason, his sense of urgency was evident. He wanted something done, and he wanted it now.

Why did Jesus refuse to get involved in this dispute? After all, it was common for people in Palestine to take their unsettled grievances to a respected rabbi. Even Moses played the role of judge among the ancient Hebrews after they left Egypt.

It is obvious Jesus did not know enough about this dispute between these brothers to make any kind of informed decision, which didn’t seem to bother this brother. He did not ask Jesus to listen to him or to investigate the details of this dispute, but he demanded that Jesus tell his brother to divide the inheritance with him.

Jesus wasn’t going to be manipulated by an angry man, even if he had been put on the spot in front of a large crowd of people. Jesus was wise and strong enough not to get drawn into this tug-o-war.

Thank you, Jesus, for reminding us we cannot solve every problem that comes our way, and it is ok to say no. If you could not, what makes us think we can?

Why did Jesus tell this parable? He was a teacher, and he took advantage of every opportunity to drive home important life-lessons.

Jesus knew these brothers were not the only two who were dealing with sensitive and serious financial issues. Everybody there was wrestling with something concerning money and possessions.

Some were struggling to make ends meet, and others were trying to decide how to use their resources. Earning and spending money dominated much of their attention and time. Jesus was fully aware of this and seized this opportunity to give his audience some good advice about the role and place of money in a person's life.

What did Jesus want his listeners, including us, to take away from this parable? I pondered this question for some time last week. Here is what I think.

The way we handle money and our possessions is very important. It will reveal whether we are wise or foolish. To a great degree, it will determine whether we live and die in peace or come to the end of our lives regretting many of our decisions.

“You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” God said to the landowner who decided to hoard his wealth.

In the end, do you think this landowner regretted any of his decisions? Do you think you will?

What made this man a fool? It appears he was smart and industrious. He was a gifted farmer and successful businessman. There is no indication in this parable he was lazy or wasteful, and no charges were brought against him for being dishonest, deceitful, corrupt, disrespectful, abusive or cruel.

Sounds like a model citizen any community would love to have. I am confident no one ever called him a fool.

So, why did God call him a fool? I suppose it boils down to this. He was selfish, ungrateful, insensitive to others' needs and indifferent. He never saw beyond himself and his small part of the world.

For the most part, life was about him. At his core, he was self-absorbed and inwardly focused.

How do I know this? Look at the pronouns this man used in his soliloquy, aggressive pronouns as Barclay refers to them. Each one points to him.

“What shall I do? I have no place to store **my** crops. 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.”

The man had no windows in his home or office, only mirrors. Everywhere he looked, he saw himself.

There is no mention of others, no awareness of their struggles or dreams and no feelings of empathy or compassion.

There are no expressions of gratitude for God, those who helped him reap this bountiful harvest or the land on which his crops grew.

There is no awareness of what his wealth could not do for him. He seems clueless to the fact that nothing of true and lasting value would come to him by building more barns, and his greed would lead to cruelty, injustice and self-destruction.

He says nothing about his neighbors and what he could do to advance the common good, improving everyone’s quality of life.

He never seeks God’s will or asks for God’s guidance so he could share his harvest with others. He even decides to build bigger barns so he can store **all** his grain.

I believe Fred Craddock sums up this farmer’s life accurately when he writes, “This man lived for himself, talked to himself, planned for himself, congratulated himself and trusted himself.”

Do you know anyone like this man? Are there times when this describes you?

It does me. When I least expect it, I can be stingy, selfish, greedy and indifferent.

I don't like myself when I am, and I am sure no one around me does either because selfishness brings the worst out in me. I adopt a critical spirit and judgmental attitude. I am irritable and restless. Nothing or no one makes me happy.

Just the opposite is true when I quit using so many personal pronouns. When I open my eyes, heart, hands and pocketbook, my whole demeanor changes.

I have discovered the two most important character traits and powerful forces in my life are gratitude and generosity. Every pity-party I have had can be traced to their absence. Every productive day filled with meaning, purpose, joy and hope has them in it.

I would be a fool to live one day without gratitude and generosity. I would be a bigger fool to die without them as a part of my legacy.