

Introductory

This material is exclusive to Luke. It is not appointed to be read on any Sunday, but it is the text for Harvest in the TLH one-year lectionary, and for Pentecost 12C in the LW three-year series.

Textual Notes

13. We were introduced to “τῶν μυριάδων τοῦ ὄχλου – the miriads of the crowd” earlier (1) in this chapter, a crowd so great that they trampled one another. A “myriad” is actually ten thousand, and in the genitive, like here, it can mean a crowd too great to number. Think of a major league sports event, and out of that crowd “Εἶπεν δέ τις ἐκ τοῦ ὄχλου αὐτῷ - one from the crowd talked to Him.”

The man is not called a “disciple,” and you have to think that the man must have put some effort into getting an audience with Jesus. He must have something very important to talk to Him about. The man states his business, requesting of Jesus, “Διδάσκαλε, εἰπὲ τῷ ἀδελφῷ μου μερίσασθαι μετ’ ἐμοῦ τὴν κληρονομίαν – teacher, tell my brother to divide with me the inheritance.”

Inheritance laws then – like in this country – belong to the civil realm, and they are dealt with in several places in the OT, but not in a systematic way, but we can adduce some general principles regarding inheritance. In Numbers (27: 5-11), the Lord allowed daughters to inherit in the absence of sons, and then He goes on to articulate what to do in various situations of living relatives.

In Genesis, Abraham had a living relative in Lot, but was going to give his inheritance first to Eliezer the slave, then to Ismael the illegitimate. Later on, in Numbers (36: 7-9), it was decreed that land was to be kept in the family; not a bad idea really. In Deuteronomy (21: 15-17), the right of primogenitor was to apply even if the eldest son belonged to a less favorite wife.

Like today, a man could bequeath his property to whomever he wanted, and we see this throughout the OT (for examples in addition to Abraham, see “inheritance” in the Jewish Encyclopedia or WIK). With the family in question, there is a father who has died, and two sons who are in dispute over the inheritance, and one of them comes to Jesus commanding or requesting Him to intervene.

How does that sort of dispute come to be? If the deceased didn’t make his wishes known, or if he did and not everybody knew about it, if he changed his mind and nobody was quite sure what his last wishes were. Here the man asks or tells Jesus to talk to his brother; clearly, he is not satisfied with his cut, and wants Jesus to render a legal opinion; in and of itself not an unusual request.

The commentators think it not unusual for this man to come to This Man with this request; it was something people commonly asked of Rabbis. In OT Law, the eldest son normally received a double portion of the inheritance. Perhaps the eldest son was dead, or perhaps there was some question of paternity, or maybe he just thought it wasn't fair, like many people think these days.

14. But that's not really Jesus' thing, no more than it would be my thing, nor should it be yours. So, if a person came to you with that same request, you would tell him that I'm a theologian, not a lawyer, and you need to go see one of them. Maybe rhetorically ask, “Ἀνθρώπε, τίς με κατέστησεν κριτὴν ἢ μεριστὴν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς – man, who appointed me a judge or divider for you?”

15. The rhetorical question is directed at “him;” the man making the request, and then He speaks to “them;” the crowd, “εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτοὺς Ὁρᾶτε καὶ φυλάσσεσθε ἀπὸ πάσης πλεονεξίας – He said to them, ‘Beware and guard yourselves from greed.’” The thing they should avoid like the plague – the noun πλεονεξία – occurs ten times in the NT, telling us the same thing Jesus does.

In his second epistle, Peter (2:3) decries the “greed” of the false prophets. BAG uses words like “greediness, insatiableness, avarice, covetousness” to describe the meaning of the word, and MM talks about “a grasping ambition.” The man who approached Jesus had gotten an inheritance, but he wanted more – he certainly wasn't arguing for less – and that's the meaning of πλεονεξία.

The KJV uses the word “covetousness,” not greed, but most of the modern translations use the word “greed,” and that's a good thing. Shakespeare used “covet” and its cognates twenty times, but “greed” only five times. Covet was more commonly used and commonly understood, but not so much these days. We hear and use “greed” all the time, but “covet” only maybe at church.

I think there's probably something of a paradox for Christians when it comes to these things; on the one hand, we are to be satisfied with what we have, and on the other hand we often want more, and we are willing to work hard to get it, and our wanting that is not forbidden by Jesus or by our religion. If we get more, then there is more to share with family and the needy as well as with self.

According to Kenneth Bartlett (*The Italian Renaissance*, The Great Courses, The Teaching Company), modern Capitalism was invented by fourteenth century Florentine Christians to generate more wealth. The idea was that more wealth meant there would be more for more people, that the wealthy would have more to give to the needy, and that, they thought, was a good thing.

But it's a thing that can get out of hand, and as the Modern Man drifts from those Christian ideals, Capitalism takes an ugly turn; “ὅτι οὐκ ἐν τῷ περισσεύειν τινὶ ἡ ζωὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ – because a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” He's talking about what we would call “assets,” not “income,” and make that distinction.

The problem is not in possessing things, and if you think it is, then you need to liquidate all your assets and do with them what you will do with them. If Jesus had wanted to say that possessing

assets is a problem, then He could have said that, and this would have been a fine time to say that. But He does not say that, and in fact we ought to look at our possessions as blessings from God.

The problem is not in possessing things, but in the “abundance” of those things, and making those things to be “ἡ ζωὴ αὐτοῦ – your life.” The bumper sticker that says, “The One Who Dies with the Most Toys Wins,” reflects the way a lot of Americans think about money and things. We see that today, and this story Jesus tells has the ring of something that happened in his day as well.

He’s talking about what you do with the leftovers. After your “daily bread” is taken care of, what do you do with what’s left. The Church Fathers proclaim loudly and clearly that you ought to give that to people who need by don’t have. Most of your older hearers have assets in the form of land, houses, IRAs, various and sundry portfolios, and pensions. Many of them have extra left over.

Once a ninety-something farmer said to me, “Pastor, it looks like I’m going to have some money left over. I want to give some of it to the church,” and he did, after a lifetime of giving to the church on a regular basis. What did he get out of that, or out of the larger contribution upon his death? The thing about Christian charitable giving is that we don’t get anything out of it.

16. Then Jesus tells a story, and we like stories, and I’m not sure why people are against the Pastor telling stories, like Jesus does all the time. He says, “Ἀνθρώπου τινὸς πλουσίου εὐφόρησεν ἡ χώρα – the land of a rich man brought forth abundantly.” We note that the land belongs to the man, and it is the land that brings forth what in farmer jargon is sometimes called a bumper crop.

We also note that it is the “land,” not the man that brings forth the crop. It is a common thought in Jesus, that the farmer plants, and the farmer harvests, but the land brings forth the crop, and it’s true. Actually, the land doesn’t need the farmer to bring forth plants and food. That happens all the time “in nature.” Man domesticates the land and animals to control what the land brings forth.

I think, my FB Groups concur, they don’t tell stories because they have heard stories used poorly, and they throw the baby out with the bath water. I have heard some horrendous use of figures of speech – especially metaphor – and had Jesus heard the same thing? And had Jesus ever heard the story used poorly? People misuse words all the time, but I’m not going to stop using words.

17. We note here that the man is very centered on self. Somebody else, not I, was keeping score, and he says that he uses first person pronouns no less than eleven times in this short story, “καὶ διελογίζετο ἐν ἑαυτῷ λέγων Τί ποιήσω, ὅτι οὐκ ἔχω ποῦ συνάξω τοὺς καρπούς μου; – and he was reasoning with himself, saying ‘what will I do, because I don’t have a place to store my fruits.’”

We might say that the man was talking to himself, and he considers the fruit of the land to be his, and he has too much, and the thought of giving away the surplus never even crosses his mind. The story is about a farmer, but the point is to anyone who has assets beyond what they need to live, and what do you do with that? Christians often give to people in need, and that’s a Christian thing.

The land brings forth food in the form of plants and animals to sustain, and the division and maintenance of land in the OT was set up to keep the land in the family, so that everybody ate. There were also laws like gleaning laws that made provision for people who didn't possess land. At the time of the telling of this parable, more people than here and now lived directly off the land.

In *Founding Gardeners. The Revolutionary Generation, Nature, and the Shaping of the American Nation*, Andrea Wulf makes the case that Washington, Jefferson, and the like envisioned ours to be a nation of farmers – which it was – that would continue into perpetuity – which it hasn't. As you well know, the percentage of farmers per population continues to decrease all the time.

So you might have some explaining to do about the nature of agriculture, particularly crops. If you are familiar with the agricultural scene, then you know that yields increase all the time. A hundred bushels of corn per acre used to be considered good, but now if you aren't over two hundred, you must be doing something wrong, and they talk about "three-hundred-bushel land."

18. Continuing to focus on himself, "Τοῦτο ποιήσω· καθελῶ μου τὰς ἀποθήκας καὶ μείζονας οἰκοδομήσω, καὶ συνάξω ἐκεῖ πάντα τὸν σῖτον καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ μου – I will do this; I will tear down my bins and build bigger and will gather together all my grain and goods," and I see that all the time. I grew up in the family grain business, and we did that all the time; built bigger bins.

It strikes the Midwesterner who knows anything about these things to hear about storing grain in the "barn." Those large, cylindrical structures that dot the landscape are called "bins," and that's where you put grain. You put horses in the horse barn, hay in the hay barn, and cows...and various and miscellaneous things like feed, tools, implements. Larger machines go in the machine shed.

Ancient man often stored grain in a hole in the ground or built structures with vertical walls made of stone or maybe wood to store grain. The root of the English word "barn" is "house for barley," and that would have been the correct word for the translators of the KJV to use in that time and place. Modern LBT continue to use "barn" – apparently, they don't get out to the farm much.

The first round "silo" was invented by in McHenry County in the late nineteenth century. The innovation was that it was round, not square, which limited spoilage invited or enhanced by square corners. These days, a silo is a larger concrete cylindrical structure to store grain or a Harvestore silo used by mostly dairy farmers to store silage. Most grain is stored in the mostly silver bins.

The Internet knows all about the Harvestore brand. Word knows nothing, and Word sees nothing.

19. Up to this point, the man has only done what would be considered business as usual, but he doesn't just leave it at that – spoiler alert! – He's going to conclude the problem right after He tells the story (21). He's still talking to himself, now saying, "τῇ ψυχῇ μου Ψυχὴ, ἔχεις πολλὰ ἀγαθὰ κείμενα εἰς ἔτη πολλά – soul, you have many things stored up for many years," and that's true.

He has done well, he thinks, for himself, “ἀναπαύου, φάγε, πίε, εὐφραίνου – rest, eat, and be merry.” Those four verbs are in the Imperative Mode; he is commanding himself to do them. The first verb is used of resting after a good days or lifetimes work, and it has connotations of merit; you have earned your rest. Eating and drinking are necessary to give sustenance to the body

The last verb means to celebrate, and this case the man is celebrating his life, especially that he has made so much money. I think I don’t believe in retirement. I intend to continue working, maybe later on going part-time, not full-time, but I’m not planning on quitting until I have to. Most people retire, but that doesn’t mean they stop working. Most of them are actually still very active.

Some people will tell you they are doing more in retirement than they did before retirement, and it makes me wonder – I never ask – what you were doing at your job all day. Our plumber says he’s going to retire but stay active. He relates how he has observed people who retire and sit in the recliner all day and he says they don’t last very long; they are dead in a couple or several years.

It sounds like the man is doing what Solomon commends,

So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor *all* the days of his life which God gives him under the sun (Ecclesiasts 8:15).

20. It’s never a good thing, and it’s always a bad thing for God to call you a “fool,” and what’s more, “ταύτη τῇ νυκτὶ τὴν ψυχὴν σου ἀπαιτοῦσιν ἀπὸ σοῦ· ἃ δὲ ἡτοίμασας, τίνι ἔσται – this night your soul is demanded back from you, what you prepared, to whom it will be?” The man’s soul is pictured as a loaner from God, Who is now calling the loan in, rather than forgiving that loan.

21. And now we find out what the problem is, “οὕτως ὁ θησαυρίζων αὐτῷ καὶ μὴ εἰς Θεὸν πλουτῶν – so the man storing up to self, who is not being rich towards God.”