

August 3, 2025
Pent 8C

During the time Jesus walked the earth, it was one of the duties of a rabbi to settle disputes regarding inheritances. So it was not unexpected that someone should ask this of Jesus. Jesus was not exactly a Rabbi, but sort of close. However, that was not the role he saw himself in. He understood that God had sent him to bring peace on earth, not judgment. Even though Christ will be the ultimate judge, that time is not yet fulfilled. Instead of taking on the role of judge, Jesus admonished this brother for making this request.

He took the situation and used it to veer off in another direction. Jesus said to him, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

Now greed is a very specific type of wanting. Greed is a very intense and selfish desire for something. It's an overwhelming urge to have more of something that you don't even need. It can be for money, fame, power, food, or sex. It could be anger, resentment, an addiction or guilt. Or it could be pride leading to a need for approval, attention, and recognition.

The problem with greed is that no matter how much it eats, it always remains hungry. It is self defeating because the goal is not really to have more money, say, but to fill some deeper, unrecognized need of an unfulfilled heart.

The parable Jesus used is a picture of greed in action and its ultimate outcome. The underlying question, for the rich man, and ultimately for us is, when the earth gives us its excess, how do we participate in that abundance? For in truth, that abundance is everywhere!

What is the solution that the rich man pursues in this passage?

He plans to tear down and build a bigger container.

How does that work out for him?

Not so good. He imagines all this wealth will bring him a time to relax, drink and be merry. This rich farmer is storing up and storing up and storing up without any attention to, or awareness of what really gives life. He says "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But that same night, that farmer dies.

What we store up eventually takes over our life.

So what if we turned this parable around and allowed god to be the most important thing in our lives?

This parable is a negative example of how to obtain fulfillment. Negative examples are wonderful teachers because we can turn them around and use them for the good. In one of my classes, they repeated over and over again: It doesn't matter if you try something and it fails. The only important thing is that you learn from it!

There are many people who have learned. Many by good or bad examples, that their relationship with God is above all other things. In this knowledge and love, they carry with them a type of glow, an inner light and a joy you rarely find. It's quite unmistakable. This can, and will happen to us when we put our life energies into our relationship with the divine.

And when you think about it, the things in life that hold the deepest meanings, values and purpose – like love, compassion, mercy and justice – cannot be stored up. They can only be given away. That's what we see in the life of Jesus. No one and no thing demanded or took his life. It was not a stored up life. It was a life given to others, for others, in each moment.

This is the great the wealth of God. This is the life God shares and invests in us through Jesus Christ. We already have it! So being rich toward God begins with knowing that we already are God's beloved treasures. There is freedom in that. It is the freedom to live richly toward others and the world.

You see, life is a flow, not a possession. The flow consists of simply receiving these wonderful free gifts of God who gives more than we can expect or imagine. As we begin to accept and be filled, we overflow into others and the world. This passage doesn't elaborate, but we know how it works. In Matthew 6, Jesus says: "For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you."

Therefore we need not worry about tomorrow, for the Lord has it all under control. And that's when you can know that even though the cosmic storm rages, we can eat, drink and be merry in the true sense.

End with this prayer by Thomas Merton

Almighty and merciful God, Father of all men, Creator and ruler of the universe, Lord of all history, whose designs are without blemish, whose compassion for the errors of men is inexhaustible, in your will is our peace.

Mercifully hear this prayer which rises to you from the tumult and desperation of a world in which you are forgotten. A day of ominous decision has now dawned on this free nation. Armed with titanic weapons, and convinced of our own right, we face a powerful adversary, armed with the same weapon, equally convinced he is right.

Save us then from our obsessions! Open our eyes, dissipate our confusions, teach us to understand ourselves and our adversary. Let us never forget that sins against the law of love are punishable by loss of faith, and those without faith stop at no crime to achieve their ends! Grant us above all to see that our ways are not necessarily your ways, that we cannot fully penetrate the mystery of your designs and that the very storm of power now raging on this earth reveals your hidden will and your inscrutable decision.

Grant us to see your face in the lightning of this cosmic storm. Grant us to seek peace where it is truly found. In your will, O God, is our peace.

Amen.