

A Life Secured

They sat across the conference table from one another. Separated by the table—but not *only* by the table. On the right side of the table sat a man with his attorney. On the left side of the table, facing him, sat members of another side of his family, with *their* attorney. They'd brought a lawsuit against this man and his mother's estate—a lawsuit over a piece of property.

They claimed that he and his brothers coerced their mother, during her final illness, to change her will and leave that property to her sons, instead of to the relatives bringing the lawsuit. Because—as his mother's pastor—I had visited her during that time, I was at that table too, having been subpoenaed so that my deposition could be taken. This happened a few years back. But as far as I know, the case still hasn't been settled.

But today we hear about *another* family's legal dispute, one that took place some two thousand years ago. For the last several weeks, in Luke's Gospel, we've been walking with Jesus toward Jerusalem. On the way, a huge throng of thousands has gathered around him. In the midst of them all, Jesus has been speaking

privately to his disciples. But as soon as he pauses for breath, someone in the crowd interrupts. *Rabbi! Order my brother to give me my share of the family inheritance.*

Now Jesus can see what's behind this demand. He's not having any part of it. But he uses it to frame a teachable moment. On the subject of greed.

You know, Jesus has more to say about wealth and possessions than about almost anything else. And it's right here in Luke that we find many of Jesus' teachings on money and material goods. And on our attitudes toward them. Today we hear him tell a story about a farmer whose land has yielded a bumper crop of grain.

So much grain, in fact, that he's worried that it won't all fit in his barns. He's concerned about where he's going to put it for safekeeping. And that doesn't really surprise us too much, does it? In our own day and time, we're urged—from childhood on—to set aside at least a portion of what we have. To save for a rainy day. For what might turn out to be a leaner tomorrow.

Now, it's not wrong to save—is it? John Wesley didn't think so. For Wesley, what matters is what you *do* with what you've saved after you've saved it.

But you and I live in twenty-first century North American culture. Doesn't this parable of Jesus resonate in the very heart of that culture? Doesn't the storage problem of this prosperous farmer sound eerily familiar? Many people have so much *stuff* that they don't know what to do with it all. I think that's one of the primary reasons that—in the last generation or so—new houses and cars have gotten bigger and bigger. Buyers insist on lots of storage space in their homes and lots of cargo room in their vehicles. Like this long-ago man, people tear down existing structures in order to build larger ones with room for more possessions. Citizens of our consumer-culture spend billions annually, renting storage facilities to house the overflow of *stuff* that won't fit in their homes.

Prompting us to wonder: at what point does saving stop and hoarding begin? Don't you think hoarding begins at precisely the point at which wealth and possessions become the focus of a person's life? Don't you think it begins at the point at which wealth and possessions become the security that a person clings to? Don't you think that hoarding begins at the point where a person can't see anything—or *anyone*—else?

That's how it is for our tycoon farmer. Jesus lets us see into this man's heart and mind. Did you notice how many times he uses the singular first-person pronouns *I* and *my*? *My crops. My barns. My grain. My goods.* It's all about him. He's thinking these thoughts to himself. Because he's alone. He's arranged his life so that there's no one else there to talk to *except* himself.

And Jesus wants us to understand that this farmer has no *thought* for anyone except himself. He has no thought for the workers who have labored to sow and to tend and to harvest this bountiful crop. He has no thought for the One who has sent the sunshine and the rain so that the grain—the wheat—might grow and flourish and be made into bread. The staff of life! Has this farmer not deprived of *life* hungry people, people that his great abundance might have fed and nourished?

In this farmer, is there any compassion? In this farmer, is there any gratitude? In this farmer, is there any generosity? In this farmer, is there any thought of God? Or of those who are created in God's image?

This farmer has isolated himself. If we too get wrapped up in the desire for and the accumulation of wealth and possessions, they isolate us. And they become more important to us than

having companions to walk with us on this journey we call life. That's sad.

And so is the never-ending craving for more, which Paul equates with idolatry. A craving that's deeply embedded in this market-driven society of ours. If we have this mind-set, whatever we buy or get or acquire, it's never quite enough. We always want just a little bit more. Just one more *thing*. If only we could have it, we'd be happy. But happiness is elusive. It stays just out of reach for those who lament with Mick Jagger: *I can't get no satisfaction!*

Our farmer *sounds* satisfied, doesn't he? For him, it's all about the grain. It's all about the goods. He's thinking that once those enormous new barns go up and all his stuff is safely stored away, socked away, stashed away, he'll have it made. No worries! He's envisioned a life of pleasure. He's safeguarded his future.

Or has he? He's stockpiled his wealth. Managed his wealth. Controlled his wealth. But can he control his *future*? This wealth he's grasped so tightly, these goods that he's allowed to become his security—and his life itself—how long will they actually be his?

For there in his self-imposed splendid solitude, he hears a voice he's never before listened to. A voice he's never before heeded. A divine voice that thunders: *Fool!*

My sisters and brothers, this self-sufficient, self-indulgent farmer's not a fool because he *has* possessions. He's not a fool because he's *saved* his possessions. He's a fool because he believes that material possessions will secure his life. He's a fool because he's lived as though there is no God. He's a fool because he's put his trust in *things* instead of putting his trust in the *Source* of the things.

This is the One in whom we're called to trust to provide all that we need every moment and every day. This is the One on whom we're called to confess our complete and utter dependence. This is the very One who demands this man's life of him.

And this is the One who demands your life and mine today. For our lives don't belong to us. Our lives belong to God in Christ Jesus. That's the good news we hear this morning. We don't need to be concerned about making our lives secure. Because, beloved, that's already been done for us!

That's been done for us by Jesus Christ, who offers you freedom from every possession that would possess *you*.

That's been done for us by Jesus Christ, the true treasure that makes you rich toward God. Immeasurably rich. Rich beyond all imagining!

That's been done for us by Jesus Christ, who gives you the greatest security for which you could ever hope. A life secured by him.

In the name of the God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.