

Luke 12:13-15

Dear Friends in Christ,

Black Friday can't wait this year. Some stores are opening at 10 PM on Thursday; others are opening at midnight. Whenever they open people will be there, sometimes getting in scuffles with other shoppers who are trying to get the hottest item. To some extent you could argue that it's good stewardship, an opportunity to get something you would have purchased anyway at a cheaper price; but in many cases we would have to say it's frenzy fueled by greed.

As Jesus was talking with his disciples someone in the crowd interrupted him with a request. **Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.** It sounds like a child at school who sees a classmate playing with a toy they want and saying, "Teacher, make him share." It sounds like some in the occupy movement who seem to be saying "we want to make others share." Maybe this man's brother was refusing to give him what was rightly his. Sharing your toys is a good thing too. But, even what seems to be an innocent statement, a proper request, or good stewardship, can be fueled by greed. That seems to be the case here because Jesus gives a harsh answer to the man's request that Jesus make his brother share.

First of all Jesus says, **who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?** If this man had any clue as to why Jesus had come to this earth he would never have asked Jesus to make his brother share. Jesus did not come to earth to be a Solomon or a Moses and settle every family squabble that people might bring to him. He did not come to preside over a world-wide people's court. People would have been very unsatisfied if he had done that. The one who knows all hearts and motives would have had to say to those in any dispute, "you are both wrong, in fact, truth be told, you both have sinned against each other and you both deserve God's eternal punishment." Jesus did not come into the world as a judge to condemn the world but to save the world. When he comes a second time, in glory, then he will serve as judge of all.

Unfortunately, there are many today, and we are tempted to do this too, who are like this man in the crowd, who look to Jesus just as a means to get what they want. You might think of the prisoner who claims to have become a Christian just because he thinks it might help him get out sooner. But it's no different than those who say, "if I worship and serve Jesus then everything will be great. He'll make sure I have enough money to pay my bills and my marriage will be great and my kids will do well in school and stay out of trouble, life will be wonderful." Jesus is not a judge or arbiter. He's not a means or a tool we can use to get what we think we want or need for this life. He is the savior.

Jesus used this man's question as an opportunity to give a warning that is always needed, but is especially needed at this time of year as we are bombarded by advertising and keep adding to all the things we might want for Christmas; things we think will make us happy. Jesus warns, **"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."** Satan is very good at using advertising to get us to think that more possessions will make us happy and solve all our problems, but they won't. Practically speaking, the more stuff you have the more time it takes to manage it all and the more need you have for an alarm system. But the real reason to be on guard against greed is that God considers greed idolatry. You might not have set up a statue that you bow down and worship, but you might as well make whatever it is that you are greedy for into a statue because that thing you are greedy for has replaced God in your heart.

Jesus illustrated his point by telling the parable about the rich farmer who built new barns to store his bumper crop and told his soul that everything was taken care of; he could now enjoy life because he had an abundance of possessions. But God called him a fool because when his last day on earth came his possessions wouldn't do his soul any good. He might have had a closet full of the finest clothes but his soul would be shamefully naked before God. Or as Jesus told his disciples in another place, **what good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?** Our lives don't consist in the abundance or lack of abundance of possessions. Some day we will leave them all behind. Our possessions won't enable us to stand before God unashamed in the judgment.

If our lives don't consist in the abundance of our possessions, in what should our lives consist? As Paul reminded Timothy, **godliness with contentment is great gain.** Being focused on God, on who he is and what he has done for us, that is what squelches greed and fosters an attitude of contentment and thanksgiving in our hearts.

It starts with the first article of the creed. God is the Creator. He made me and every creature. Everything in all the universe belongs to him. All my talents and abilities come from him and all my possessions belong to him. I am not an owner. I am a steward. I simply manage the things God has given me until he decides to call me home to heaven. At that point, he gives the things that I was managing to someone else to manage until he calls them home. The more we remind ourselves of this fact the easier it will be for us to fight the daily battle against greed and the more we will find that we are content with and thankful for whatever we have. We will realize that our life doesn't consist in the abundance of our possessions.

When those times come when we feel like the man in the crowd, when we want to call out to Jesus and say, "Make them share with me;" when we realize that our hearts are filled with jealousy and greed instead of godliness and contentment; when we realize our sins and how many idols we have worshiped; it is then that we need the reminder the second article gives us. Jesus has redeemed us, **not with gold or silver**, but with his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. He was holy and innocent. He was not overcome by greed and jealousy. When Satan tempted him with the power and glory of earthly kingdoms he resisted. He didn't use his power to gain earthly possessions. He was content with just the clothes on his back and his daily bread. He went to the cross as the sinless Lamb of God so that he could take our sins of jealousy and greed and thanklessness, our sins of idolatry, our thinking that an abundance of possessions would make us happy and solve all our problems, he took all those sins on his shoulders and took the punishment we deserve for them on himself. When we recognize the greed that lurks in our hearts and confess it as sin, Jesus graciously points us to his cross and says, "You are forgiven."

That's what our life truly consists in. All the possessions in the world can't provide forgiveness for even one sin. All the possessions in the world can't buy us even a millisecond of time in heaven. But Jesus has purchased an eternity in heaven for us and he gives it to us as a gift. That's what provides contentment. That's what moves us to give thanks.

Since there are so many ads; since it's hard to find anyone who understands that it's not all about having an abundance of possessions; since we are by nature filled with jealousy and greed; we need constant, daily reminders to watch out for greed; we need constant, daily reminders that having an abundance of possessions is not going to solve all our problems. Those daily reminders are available. God has given us unlimited access to them. He has given

us his word and made it more available to us today than it has been to any other people on earth, except maybe the disciples who were with Jesus when he lived on earth. If we are going to fight against jealousy and greed and all the temptations that surround us each day we need to be in the word each day. As we read and study the word and receive God's special gift of the Sacrament, God promises that the Holy Spirit is working to strengthen our faith and keep us strong in the conviction that **our lives don't consist in the abundance of our possessions but that godliness with contentment is great gain.** Through the word and sacrament the Holy Spirit is working to help us recognize and give thanks each day that God made us and has given us everything we have as his stewards; that he loves us so much that he sacrificed his son on the cross to save us for all eternity; that he wants to feed our souls through the word and sacrament until he comes again to take us to be with him forever.

If we are like the man in the crowd who wanted Jesus to make his brother share the inheritance we won't be thankful. But, if we focus on who God is and what he has already done for us, that he is our creator; that he sacrificed his only Son to save us; that he has called us to be his own; then our hearts will be filled with thanks and praise.