

Luke 12:13-21

Greed is one of those sins we can easily spot in others, but rarely see in ourselves. Therefore it's time that we define it accurately. What is greed? It's the desire to have more when one already has enough. Greed plays havoc with the faith of a Christian. We all have it lurking within our hearts, and so we all must battle it daily.

But Jesus doesn't just warn us about the sin of greed in our text for today; He tells a parable to warn particularly of the imbalance in a person's life when greed takes over. And that imbalance is this: to be greedy for more in life, but not greedy for more of Jesus. How do I know if my heart and life is out of balance? When I think I've had enough of God's Word and Sacraments, but not enough of the things and pleasures of this world.

This sinful imbalance will, if unchecked, cause God to call such a person a fool. This, however, is not what God wants to call you. And so He speaks to you today through this very sermon to put your life back in balance. For He delights in calling you, not fools, but His precious sons and daughters in Christ Jesus.

The man in the parable was a fool. Jesus says so. Not because he was wealthy. Not because he had enough stuff. But because his life revolved around what he had, and not around God. This man was in turmoil. Why? Because of his wealth. He had grief because he had more stuff than what his barns could hold.

Does our wealth ever cause us grief? "My expensive new car just won't run right!" "My investments are down a little!" "My closets are simply too small for all my clothes!" Really? How much of your day is consumed by stress and worry about your possessions? Compare that with how much of your day is spent in the Word and in prayer. Your life, your heart, may well be out of balance. These words are for me, too. The Holy Spirit is the preacher here; not me. And He is warning us to pay attention to what we are hearing today.

The fool in Jesus' parable received no such warning. Or, if he did, he paid no attention to it. At least a dozen times this man uses the pronoun, "I," or "My." "*What shall I do,*" he says, "*to store **my** crops?*" Nearly every other word out of this man's mouth is about himself. "Well, I'm not like that!" we say; "God is in my life more than He was in the life of that fool!" But covetousness and greed, which is idolatry, is not what we think it is. It's not just elevating our possessions higher than God; it's even giving them an equal place with God. God does not ask to be on the same level with everything else in our life. He demands to be the highest in our life. If work or pleasure, family or possessions are placed higher, or are equal with God, these have become idols for us. You and I are more like the fool in the parable than we may be willing to admit. Unless we repent, we will be called fools on the Day of Judgment.

This is not, however, what God desires. And so He speaks earnestly to us today. And through His words, He works in our hearts. A fool, you see, is unwilling to change because he is unwilling to listen. But Jesus' sheep, He says, listen to His voice. Jesus' sheep, His sons and daughters, may act foolishly, but they are not fools. For when Jesus speaks, they listen and they repent.

The Gospel for us is that Jesus became a fool on our behalf. You heard correctly. Jesus became a fool. Listen to what He says to the fool in the parable: *“Fool! This very night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”* On Good Friday, these same words could have been spoken to Jesus: *“This very day Your soul is required of You, and the things You have prepared, whose will they be?”* And the answer to the question is: yours! The fool in the parable gave no thought to this. But this thought consumed Jesus. Everything He prepared was not for Himself, but for you. When He died on the cross, everything that belonged to Him was declared yours, and in your Baptism it was all given to you.

“What a fool!” some would say; “Jesus gave it all away!” Exactly! But this is why Jesus was born into our world. He came to be a fool in this manner. And though the Gospel is declared to be foolish by the world, it is this very word of foolishness (1 Cor. 1:21) which makes you who you are: sons and daughters of Christ, having as your possession all the wealth of heaven, for this is what Jesus prepared for you.

We could say that His life was out of balance. He gave no thought to where He would lay His head. He came not to be served, but to serve. Jesus was out of balance because everything He did was not for Himself, but for you. He leaned so far over in your direction, and away from Himself, that He was completely imbalanced.

You’ve seen the dump trucks out here on Highway 94. When they raise their open-box beds high into the air, everything in them comes sliding out onto the ground. These trucks would not be driven down the highway in this up position, for they are out of balance when their beds are raised. Yet with Jesus, everywhere He went He was in this imbalanced position. He came to be a dump truck we can say; not keeping anything for Himself, but raising Himself up high on a cross to give everything He had prepared to you.

Sin causes your life and mine to be out of balance. We lean inwardly toward ourselves. We lean away from God. But Jesus is here for you. He was raised up high on a cross to pour into you His gifts. Through Baptism you are given new life in Christ. Through Holy Communion you are given strength to live that life as a Christian in this evil world. Through the Word you are given the Holy Spirit who keeps you joined to Christ as a branch to a vine.

Only a fool would despise these gifts. You are not fools, but you are sons and daughters of Christ. You are His precious sheep who are here to listen, and to repent; here to receive everything that Jesus has prepared for you.

Have you acted foolishly? Yes, you have...and so have I. God forgives you. Jesus was raised up on the cross for you, friend. You are now able to leave your foolish ways behind, and as God’s forgiven people live with your life in total balance.

In the past you and I have raised up many things in life higher than God. But that’s why He raised Himself up high on a cross, so that you look, not with greedy eyes at what this life has to offer, but at your Crucified Lord through whom you are raised with Christ, forgiven of all sin, and declared to be His dear sons and daughters. Amen.