

(Pastor read The Dash by Linda Ellis. Due to copyright, we cannot include it in this online version of the sermon, however, you may download a free copy for personal use at thedashpoem.com.)

Jesus is approached by someone saying, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance.” Now, last week, I did tell you that Jesus noted we should ask for what we need. I don’t think that’s what’s happening here. The man is demanding that Jesus get involved in a personal family matter.

Just a few weeks ago, in the story of Martha and Mary, we heard a similar request made of Jesus. “Teacher, tell my sister to help me.”

In both cases, Jesus declined to do exactly what was asked and instead, he shared that things of a spiritual nature outweigh things of a physical nature. While today’s story echoes the Martha and Mary story, it does something more.

It speaks to greed. It also speaks to right relationship. Right relationship with God and with each other. I can’t tell you how many times in my life I’ve heard about parents dying and siblings fighting over money. Have you heard that before? The thing is that, until it happened to me—I couldn’t understand how people could value money over relationship. I’ve learned that sometimes it’s not “about money”. Sometimes, it’s that there were shaky-at-best relationships for years and the stress of losing a parent and the clashing of different values and lifestyles can be problematic.

So is this brother just out for the money? Or does he have a less than stellar relationship with his sib? Or is it both? This isn’t the first time we would be seeing Biblical sibling rivalry. Remember Cain and Abel? Jacob and Esau? For both of those sets of sibs, jealousy and personal greed caused a great divide.

Jesus tells the man a story of a farmer who had a bumper crop. So big, in fact, that the farmer decided to tear down all of his storage and build new ones. He decided that he would just store it all up for later. (Guess he wasn’t familiar with the Lord’s Prayer and the verse about getting our daily bread!)

The farmer wants to store up all that he has for himself. He’s not going to feed the town. He uses the word, “I” six times in his musings about what to do. Then comes the rub. The man will die that night and he won’t get to use **any** of what he’d been greedily storing up. Jesus is quick to point out that richness without richness toward God won’t do anyone any good.

I want to tell you about some people who got some unexpected riches and **were** rich toward God. Some versions of the Bible include the words to ‘lean toward God’. I love that image. Like a day lily rooted in one spot, let moving toward the light. Each of us is rooted in this world, yet we can still lean toward God. The Smith family did just that.

Just about three years ago, a New Jersey family of won a lottery jackpot. A big one. \$429 million dollars. They lived in an impoverished neighborhood. They could have used the money to move and never looked back. But this is a family that knew God and gave back already, working in soup kitchens and community gardens.

According to their website, “Blessed with a new opportunity, the family made it their collective mission to improve the quality of life for residents in their hometown . . .” by channeling funds to education, youth, children, neighborhood development—and Christian education. . . all in their hometown of Trenton, New Jersey. Again, directly from their website, “With God at the forefront of their mission, the family plans to combine their individual talents and experience to transform lives in their community through the Smith Family Foundation.” <https://smithfamilyfoundationnj.org/about-us/>

Praise God for this family that leaned toward God. Do you see the dichotomy of this family being rich toward God with their unexpected windfall—and the foolish rich farmer who wanted to store up all the grain that God had given him for only his own benefit? *Do you think Jesus would have told that same story if the farmer had filled his storehouses to the top, but then, instead of tearing down the barns to build bigger ones so he could hoard all the crops, what if he'd given away all the surplus?*

And what about the brother we started with? The one who already got some inheritance and wanted Jesus to make his brother divide his. (Which we can either read as splitting the land instead of working it together or having the older brother give some of his double portion to the younger brother.) Do you think he learned the lesson?

I'm blessed to know a colleague who is a pastor, professor, and prolific author. His name is Bruce Epperly and he says this: "While we love the world best by loving God, we also love God best by loving the world." Think about that. Enjoy your rich blessings, and save some for tomorrow, please remember to be rich toward God and share some today. Blessed be and amen.