

An Authentic Life
Luke 12:13-21
June 21, 2020

Everyone would like to live an authentic life; filled with the hope that we have made decisions to reach the purpose for which we believe we were born. But with the many distractions in life that we can be turned by the lust of our eyes, it is not easy. Getting side tracked is a hazard of life, in which we struggle against every day. Most of us have our goals set before us, and our belief in God, then either through desire or fear we are off chasing something else, hoping to fill the feeling of insecurity or that false sense of happiness. This is what happened to the young man who came out of the crowd to ask Jesus to help him find justice. The story goes like this:

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." ¹⁴ But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵ And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

The life situation behind this request or demand to Jesus is important for us to understand. It will help us unlock the concern and the reasons for this request, and why Jesus responded the way he did. It is fairly obvious that this young man was not a tenant farmer. If he was, there would not be a discussion about inheritance. He was the son of a landowner, who in his death left the property to his sons. This is customary. The oldest son would have been in charge of the estate, and the younger son would have been expected to stay and work the farm, and share in the wealth. But this young man wanted out with his share, which was not customary. So before coming to Jesus with his request, he would have followed the proper protocol and gone to the court. But the courts were very traditional, and they saw no reason for the splitting of property. In other words, it is like a divorce, when a person must bring charges against the other, before they will grant the request. The courts did not see in this man's request any justification for splitting or buying out the younger brother. Jesus would have known that. He saw behind this request a thirst for money and freedom, in other words, a thirst for greed.

It should be pointed out that it was very hard for courts to figure out just how much a farm is worth and what should be paid. So, the courts did not bother with the case, and sent the young man packing. But there is a tradition that allows for a clergyperson to become the arbitrator in such cases. That is why this young man sought Jesus out, when he heard he was in town. He found Jesus and did just that. But what kind of case was it. He didn't present misdeeds, graft or any other kind of offense to Jesus, which would have helped his case. All he said was, "**Tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.**" But Jesus knew the law, and he knew what was going on behind the eyes of this young man. Like the prodigal son, he too wanted this money to follow his own desires for freedom, to do anything he wanted. There was no abuse from the older brother that is driving him away, it is another kind of abuse that is filling his head with the desire to get out----greed and a distorted view of happiness. The young man wanted to run away from his responsibility and his self, to find the world of the senses.

Jesus' response was for the purpose of helping him find an authentic life. When Jesus said, **"Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions,"** he was trying to be this young man's spiritual advisor to find his purpose in life; holding up his brother in the work of the farm.

So, Jesus, in order to cement this advice between the cracks in his character, Jesus tells the parable of the Rich Fool. The parable starts like this:

"The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' ¹⁸ Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' ²⁰ But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

The parable is a simple one, but there are two statements that direct this parable back to this young man. The first is the opening sentence, "The land of a rich man produced abundantly." Jesus lets the young man know that he has all he needs. I know that you live on a farm that produces well, and you have everything you need, with your brother. Jesus drives his point home when he continues with an inner discussion of the rich man, who is all alone. His inner conversation takes him to the place of fulfilling those desires of a free life, without work or responsibility. He decides to tear his barns down, build bigger ones, and live a life of luxury; which is the abusive dream that keeps us from living an authentic life--life without responsibility and friendship.

But Jesus bursts the bubble of this young man in the pursuit of following his dream. He continues, "God said to the rich man, "You fool! This very night your life is required. And then who will get all that you have set aside for yourself?" This is the second statement that links this story specifically to the young man. If he goes off on his own, with his loot from his inheritance, and then dies, who is going to get it? Living at home with his brother he has a partner, someone to work with, share pain with and someone to be responsible for. Jesus in a backhanded way tries to show this young man, that life is more than the dream of abundance and freedom. It is about living for and with God. It is about finding your purpose, and people to share it with, and giving yourself to that. This is how you become rich in God.

There is something hollow in this story. Both in the parable and the statement of the young man. There is such a steel minded fixation on wealth as the answer to the emptiness we feel inside. Wealth is always hollow, unless it is directed to the betterment of humanity. Authentic life styles demand of us that we listen to others, care about others and act responsibly to others. This is our spiritual requirement. If we are to avoid the trap of living alone with just the things we have bought for ourselves, we must turn from the false things of life, and embrace the authentic life.