

“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me”

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READINGS Colossians 3: 1-11
Luke 13: 13-21



The Parable of the Silly Greedy Farmer in our children’s story is more often entitled the Rich Fool.



I wonder where your sympathies lay as we listened to the reading.....

Were they with - the rather forceful brother who told Jesus what to do?

-the farmer who had just experienced a bumper crop & planned for a prosperous relaxed retirement , only to “pop his clogs “ before he could enjoy it?

OR with Jesus who had already been told how to solve a sisterly conflict of interests a little before this in the story of Martha & Mary. Martha’s “Lord tell her to help me!” sounds similar to “Teacher ,tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me”- a rather brusque command that exposes family frustrations.

Surely having someone of Jesus’s mana on your side would add sufficient pressure on the other party to achieve the desired outcome for the “victim”!

As an aside, in the recent Ihumaatau land dispute in Auckland, Jacinda Arden intervened when the protestors wanted her weight added to their cause, and now the Maori King has also become involved. It will be interesting to see whether these people can help broker a peace settlement between parties.

The relationship between brothers and sisters or even other family members or tribes can become very competitive, with rivalries that can escalate, leading to tragic outcomes.

From the beginning of the book of Genesis, Bible history is full of sibling conflict- jealousy , betrayal , estrangement and murder.(beginning with Cain & Abel, Esau and Jacob, and Joseph and his brothers.). Even in Jesus’s crew that included 2 sets of brothers, James and John’s fiery reputation had earned them the nickname “Sons of Thunder”. John the Baptist was beheaded because he had pointed out publicly that Herod had unlawfully taken his brother’s wife as his own.

Some horrible endings- which is why when REFUSING to endorse the brother’s claim on his inheritance, Jesus also warned against greed- ALL KINDS of greed.

What can siblings be greedy for?

Fair distribution of goods, love ,attention, significance, power, approval.....

And what is greed?

Wanting more than you can use or need,

(Dictionary)Excessive or rapacious desire especially for wealth or possessions

A selfish desire for more of something than is needed

Inordinate , insatiable longing for material gain- food, money, status, power....

Avarice.

Jesus , instead of reminding his audience of the lessons they should learn from the failings of their revered named ancestors told a parable about an unnamed rich farmer.

The Parable of the Rich Fool has inspired artists and preachers for Millenia.

I'd like to share a couple of depictions of the farmer in question.

Firstly(see link) Rembrandt's The Rich Fool painted in 1627.(Berlin Museum Gallery)

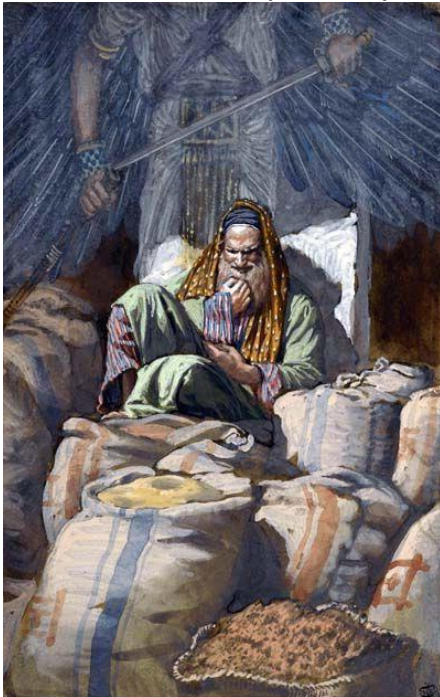
There is no hint of produce or barns in this picture.

Instead a rather tired old chap gazing lovingly at a gold coin, with other gold on the table, and books around him(apparently the books are a symbol of pride or "vanity").

As in many of Rembrandt's paintings, a glow of light illuminates the subject.



The next one "The Man who Hoards" is by James Tissot, a nineteenth century French artist who painted prolifically, including many Bible scenes, particularly after he experienced a rekindling of his faith at the age of 48.



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(A large series of these opaque watercolours are owned by Brooklyn Museum USA)

Tissot spent a lot of time painting in England, and his detailed rendition of fabric owes something to his father's occupation as a draper. He was a contemporary of the Impressionists, & also travelled to the Middle East in order to better understand the Biblical settings he wanted to illustrate.

He died in 1902 aged 66.

What is your impression of The Man who Hoards? (Congregation suggested he looks comfortable, he looks like he is checking his cellphone!! He is unaware of the angel of death right behind him)

What do you notice about both these pictures? The rich man is on his own.

Jesus told of the rich man -talking to himself, & referring frequently to

himself & "my" possessions with no reference to other people or God.

Faced with a dilemma of barns unable to hold his bounty, he asked the right question-

"What shall I do?" but only of himself, so his answer was wanting.

He unwittingly planned for a future that very soon his death would render him unable to enjoy! His focus has been to store his goods for a time when he might maximise his profit, when that produce has become scarce. He seemed more intent on keeping his crop than showing gratitude to God or his workers, or helping out those with less.

Even his planned future celebration was to be solitary. For all his plans and wealth, it appears a pretty lonely situation. He didn't "get" what modern reach has proved- that meaningful work, good relationships and faith are all contributors to healthy longevity and satisfaction.

At the end of the book of Genesis, there is an expression that Jacob (aka Israel) uses to describe his imminent death. I think it is rather appealing. Jacob said to his family.....

“I am about to be gathered to my people”. Gen 49 v 29

He then gives instructions about his burial site, mentioning by name all of his forebears buried there in the land of Canaan.

Once his blessing of , and instructions to his sons were finished (both blessing & instruction are important parental tasks, here the final tasks of an elderly father), Jacob “drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.”

(Not a bad way to go!)

The rich man in Jesus’s story seems to have NO people NOR God.

His only company and consolation is his material wealth, which he is shortly to be parted from. Our man is not a fool because he has enjoyed material success, but because it has been his main focus, to the exclusion of loving and enjoying God and other people- the only currency accepted in heaven.

(One commentator points out that gold in heaven is roading material, perhaps symbolic again of how values are inverted in God’s kingdom!)

The rich man has also falsely assumed that life will continue on as it has , unaware of the fragility of blessings such as good health. The kind of gratitude for life and Gods hand in it expressed in our Psalm today has eluded him. (Psalm 107: 1-9 & 43] The generous response to his abundance is also missing- he hasn’t understood the divine paradox that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

St Augustine expressed it that the bellies of the poor would have been safer storehouses for the overflowing crop than the new barns that were never built.

So what meaning is there for us to take from the parable? You can and will find many applications, but I have drawn three.....

1/ Get God’s take on your plans and dilemmas, especially family ones!

He knows and understands all parties AND the best resolution. Ask God first , but be a team player too.

2/Don’t delay in giving (or forgiving!)-take the opportunity when it presents!

(If you hold on too long, sometimes you can find it harder to do it!)

3/Remember to be rich TOWARD GOD. If we are facing toward God we get the right perspective on life, and His face can shine on us, which is the great blessing of peace and security.

Finally 1 Timothy 6:17 explains how....

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God who richly provides us with everything FOR OUR ENJOYMENT.

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is TRULY LIFE!

AMEN