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Pentecost 8

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Which Inheritance Do You Want?”

Text: Luke 12:13-21; Colossians 3:1-11; Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:12-14, 18-26

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Someone in the crowd said to [Jesus], “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

I just want to point out something about that statement to begin . . . if the brothers are dividing an inheritance, *that means their father just died*. And instead of mourning, they’re fighting. Instead of coming together, they’re splitting apart. Instead of comforting, they’re coveting. *Dad’s dead. What can I get?*

Every once in a while a story like that will hit the news or social media. It’s sad. And it’s ugly. There’s going to be a winner and a loser, and while you may get what you want, in the meantime you lose your brother, split up the family, cause irreparable harm. Is it worth it? Is that thing, that money, worth that?

Some would say yes. And at times, for something far less. Stupid fights and disagreements divide brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, parents and children. Maybe you’ve been there, made that mistake. The people and families God gave to love us and for us to love, are thrown away. You may have gotten what you wanted, but did you really become richer? Or did you really become poorer?

And to make things even worse, this request was made of Jesus right after He was teaching about *not fearing those who can only kill the body; fear the one who has authority to cast into hell*. Don’t fear losing the worldly, Jesus said; fear losing the eternal. Fear losing the one who loves you more than anything in this world; more than any other part of creation. And in response to that . . . *yeah, yeah. But tell my no good brother to divide the inheritance with me!*

I don’t know . . . Maybe we do it, too. We come here. We hear the Word. We receive the gifts. Eternal things. Eternal life. And then we leave . . . and does Dr. Jekyll become Mr. Hyde? Do we forget about the eternal and focus again on the worldly? Do I put more effort into acquiring worldly riches instead of heavenly riches? Am I all about getting rather than giving? It doesn’t really make sense, does it? But it’s an

easy trap to fall into.

That's why Jesus says: ***Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness.*** All covetousness. Whatever form it takes. And what's translated there as *take care* means *look at yourself*. Take a look at your life, how you're living, what you're doing, what your heart is going after, what you're throwing away. And *be on guard* against this happening in your life. Cause it's so easy, and it so often happens before you know it.

Like the man in the parable. Jesus does this a lot: He makes a point, and then tells a parable to back it up, drive it home. And let's be honest: **all of us would like to be the man in the parable.** His farm had an unbelievable year. He probably had worked very hard to make that happen. And now, he's got it made. He doesn't have to work anymore. He can buy all he wants and enjoy the good life. Except he can't, *for that very night he dies*. And as they say, you can't take it with you.

Now the problem isn't the riches, but what those riches do to us. **These riches were a gift from God, but became this man's god.** So instead of being rich toward God, he was rich for himself. Instead of finding his security in being a child of God, his security was in his wealth. Instead of finding his value in God and His love, his value was in the number and size of his barns and houses. *And so as a result, he died a very poor man.*

This is what St. Paul was talking about in the Epistle we heard today, too. He mentions **covetousness** among those earthly things that hurt us, and did you catch what he called it there? *Idolatry*. For what we want, what we set our heart on, whether we get it or keep chasing after it, becomes our god. It is what we *fear, love, and trust*. What I **fear** not having, what I **love** and want more than anything, what I **trust** will make me happy. What I will do *anything* - or *almost* anything - for. And the problem is not the person or the thing or the activity or whatever it is - **the problem is that it has captured your heart. The problem is what it has done to you.** And sadly, many very wealthy, successful, famous people, who seem to have it all, like the man in the parable, *die very poor*.

So Jesus says: ***Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness.*** That is, don't let that happen to you. Because what idolatry does is it takes our hearts and minds off the true and puts them onto the false. It makes us think the lie is true and the truth is a lie. It makes us believe that these things can and will make me happy and give me what I want, but instead do the very opposite. And when talking about this with my catechumens, **the example I use is salt water.** Salt water is deceptive, because salt water cannot quench your thirst. If you drink salt water, it only makes you *more* thirsty. It actually kicks your kidneys into overdrive, so drinking salt water

doesn't hydrate you, it actually dehydrates you.

The man in the parable, his riches were his salt water. The more he drank, the man he wanted. The more he had, the more he wanted. What's yours? It might be different for each of you, but we all have something. *Look at yourself*, as Jesus said. What is that salt water you need to guard your heart against?

Because - here's the thing - while we're setting our hearts and minds on *this* or *that*, we're missing, we're not seeing, the true riches we do have. The man in the Gospel who wanted Jesus to get him his share of the inheritance, **missed the true treasure that was standing right in front of him!** The very Son of God in human flesh! The Son of God who came not to *divide His* inheritance with us, **but to give us the whole thing!** The kingdom of God, Sonship, eternal life - all of it, yours. And it's an *inheritance*, which means **He will die to pass it on to you**. And not a natural death, like we all hope for, that we'll die in our sleep. But a crucifixion. A cursed death. A death with your curse, so you can die without that curse. *The Son of God, the King of the universe, died a very poor man, to make you rich.*

That's why St. Paul says to ***seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.***

That's where your life is. That's your true treasure. That's an inheritance that will never get used up or go away. So not for nothing does the prophet Jeremiah call Jesus *the fountain of living water* (Jeremiah 17:13). And Jesus Himself says, *If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink* (John 7:37). And then this too, *whoever drinks of the water that I will give him, Jesus says, will never be thirsty again* (John 4:14). So what Paul is saying is: Quit drinking the salt water of this world, which is killing you! Stop living the same old way. ***Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness . . . anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth . . . lying.*** Why do you do those things? What are you hoping for, looking for, with them? Put them all away, he says. Lock them up and throw away the key.

That's not where your life is, or where you will find the life you're looking for. King Solomon tried that, as we heard in the Old Testament reading, and look where it left him! ***Vanity, vanity, he says. It's all meaningless. Striving after wind.*** Striving after riches and dying poor.

There's a better way. Instead of, ***Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!*** How about: *Lord, give me your inheritance!* And Jesus says: **Yes! Done!**

Here is my inheritance, here are the gifts that no one and no thing can take from you - *not even death*. With these you may or may not be healthy, wealthy, and wise in this world, *but you will die a very rich man*. Here is forgiveness for your sins, life for your death, glory for your shame, the eternal for what is passing away - the true God and His gifts, instead of false gods and their lies. All for you. Be washed, be clean, be fed and nourished. And while your riches and richness may be hidden now, ***when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in the richness of His glory.***

And in the meantime, instead of ***Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!*** How about: *Brother, let me share my inheritance with you.* And how do we do that? Telling others about Jesus, certainly. But not just with our words, but also with our lives. Forgiving, loving, serving, giving. Being faithful to my husband or wife. Being generous with my time. Telling the truth. Being patient and kind. And you know what? Sometimes doing those things may make you feel like you're being crucified! They're not easy, especially when others don't appreciate them, take advantage of you, don't do the same for you, and even make fun of you. But that's what they did to Jesus, too. And still He did that, **for you**. And so still we do that, for them. And you lose nothing. For your wealth, your inheritance, is not of this world.

And when you die, the wealth, the inheritance, you leave behind will be true wealth, and a true inheritance. The Jesus kind. The lasting kind. And when you die, you will die a very rich man, with riches you can take with you. Forever. **Because your brother gave His inheritance to you.**

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.