

Mine!

Sermon for Thanksgiving Sunday

Sermon Text: Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." ¹⁴ But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵ And He said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." ¹⁶ And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear 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, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

What should the rich landowner have done to avoid being called a "fool" by future generations? Should he have not built a barn, or should he have just let his crops rot in the fields? As we learn from the Old Testament story of Joseph, building a barn can be downright ingenious and in Joseph's story, is even part of God's Will that he does just that. Even in this modern age, people can't survive if we hadn't built even bigger storehouses and more complex supply chains. No, the rich landowner didn't become a fool because he made provisions. Perhaps it was his fault that he just worked his whole life long and didn't take care of his own health? That also somehow sounds familiar... Someone works and toils his whole life, invests his money in safe investments, but a heart attack derails everything. Yes, even that can happen to any one of us and if that's how it goes, it's stupid. Having said this, that's not the reason why the landowner is described as a fool in Jesus' parable. We find the reason somewhere else. We find a clue when Jesus lets us see into the man's heart. There we find a man having an inner monologue. He's talking with his soul. God has no role in his life, he remains with himself. This is different than King David who sings in Psalm 103: "Praise the Lord, O my soul." With the rich landowner, we find a vicious cycle of selfishness. His soul doesn't open itself to God but remains closed to God. 11 times, the landowner talks about himself. You can summarize his life with "me, myself, and I." With this, there is no increase of the ego but only an opening to the "you", an opening to heaven, an opening to God and an openness to the neighbor. All of this remains hidden from the rich landowner. He remains within himself and that's why he is a fool. He is not just a fool but extremely poor because without God, only what is temporary remains. Only the harvest, the barns, and the worries about the future remain and this draws us deeper and deeper into meaninglessness. In the example of the rich landowner, we can see all this clearly as Jesus leads us deeper into the man's inner being. In the end, the landowner loses himself completely within himself. He creates his own heaven here on earth. "*Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry!*" The heaven that the rich landowner painted for himself is really crazy. Some dream of such a heaven: a place with much to eat and drink. Some imagine paradise in this way. The ideologies of our world often try to create heaven here on earth so that in the end they can say as the rich landowner said: "Soul, you have reached your goal! Now we can have a good time!" Such ideologies leave no room for God and are closer to foolishness. "You fool," says God to such fanciful ideas. You have thought a lot about many things but you've missed what's important. Not only have you lived your life without God, but you've also planned your purpose in life without God in it. That's why you are a fool, because it is impossible to ignore God. At some point, God is just there – and then how do you stand with all your fantasies? Many people who are seriously ill or on death row report how, in the face of death, they suddenly ask themselves completely different questions than before. The questions that appeared so important before are suddenly

and laughably irrelevant. Just like the landowner who suddenly sees his life on a scale and must realize that he has simply forgotten the most important thing. It is tragic when a person realizes this too late.

Jesus tells us a parable here to warn us away from the foolishness of the rich landowner. Jesus shares this parable with us because He wants to protect us from a rude awakening. He doesn't want us to go through life thoughtlessly and pretend that God doesn't exist. He also doesn't want us to be the saddest of all people, keeping everything neat and tidy on the outside, while pushing God into the background with our actions and creations. Jesus wants all our thoughts and plans to be focused on God first – for example, that we first give thanks for all the good gifts that we can see on the altar today. We are and always remain guests at God's table.

Thanks be to God for these gifts! Thank you, God, for this space in which to worship! Thank you, God, that we can safely pray and worship. Thank you, God, for sending us donors who have supported us in the Lukaskirche project. Thank you for the many people who continue to support us and pray for us now as well. Lord, help us to not thoughtlessly plan, toil, worry... Lord, help us to make the right decisions. Help us put Your plan and goals as first in our lives...

Today we celebrate Thanksgiving and thank God for all the good things that He has given us. It is important that we celebrate Thanksgiving because thankfulness is often ignored. So gratitude is an important key in freeing us from our selfishness. This Thanksgiving, we want to break out of this narrow, self-centered thinking and acknowledge the Creator of all things who is behind all of our being. We'd like to say to God the Creator that we recognize how richly He has blessed us, starting from the smallest things to the biggest things. Even the shopping bag I bring home is not something I earned just through working – behind this bag is a long chain that reaches from the grain in the fields to the packaged groceries that I can buy, behind this stands many people who have prepared everything for me. I never stand there alone. My education, my upbringing, my language and culture I owe to my parents and many other people. And behind all of this there is only One: our loving Father in heaven who not only willed everything but also planned everything to the last detail so that I can live my life on earth. The rich landowner is a fool, not because he builds barns but because he thinks that he is alone in his planning and creating. He hasn't recognized God's great plan for his life and therefore remains the loser in this story. God wants to free us from such selfishness and thankfulness can truly free us. Thankfulness can not only free us from a worried glance at our bank account but also free us to notice God in all parts of our lives. That is truly liberating. I'd like to explain how liberating this can be with two examples. There are two important people of whom Christians as well as non-Christians say that it is simply unexplainable how they achieved such great things in such a short life: Martin Luther and Johann Sebastian Bach. We find the secret of both men at the end of each of their works where it states: "Soli Deo Gloria" – to God alone be the glory! Thankfulness is a mystery. Thankfulness is a mystery because all the good gifts that God gives us in our lives are felt by us at the point of gratitude. When I give thanks, I am saying that I recognize that God has given me all of this. This applies to both material and spiritual gifts. God has given it all to us, and to God alone is the glory due. To claim otherwise is foolish. Amen.