

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 07/31/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, July 31st

Luke 12:13-21

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The right perspective on life

As a lead into the text, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27) and engaged in teaching the crowds. This general section is described as various warnings and teachings (11:27-13:9). Whether these teachings all occurred at the same time or are a collection of Jesus' teachings arranged in a specific order is not clear. The text begins as someone in the crowd gives Jesus an opening for some teaching on the right use of material possessions. This text is known as the Parable of the Rich Fool. At the root of this parable is covetousness and having the right perspective on life.

Luke 12:13-21

¹³ 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."

Jesus appears to be in the middle of teaching when someone in the crowd asks Him to intervene in the proper division of inheritance. While the Law covered most cases (Deuteronomy 21:17) there were some cases where there was room for doubt and Rabbis were asked to intervene. In this instance the man in the crowd is not asking for Jesus to weigh in on the decision but to rule in his favor! Jesus here refuses to get involved. His response, "Man" is not as we would consider as "Hey man!" but a way of emphasizing this man in a stranger. Jesus does not know him. This is born out with the rest of the sentence. Jesus is on earth to bring people to God, not possessions to people. For Jesus, he was more concerned about the attitude to property versus who got what.

Based on Jesus' caution to the man and the parable that follows, the man was probably speaking out of greed. Jesus' response opens with a very strong warning - "Take care, and be on your guard..." The word rendered as *take care* (*horate*) could also be rendered as "beware." The warning is against all covetousness. Jesus' statement that "one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" is one that flies in the face of our culture's materialistic perspectives.

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."

Jesus then tells the parable. Some things about the subject in the parable can be concluded. First, he does not appear to be a wicked man. His bounty has not been gained illegally - it was the land of the man that produced plentifully. He does not appear to have exploited anyone in the process. Neither does the man appear to be particularly greedy since he is caught by surprise at the extent of his bounty. The man makes what appears to be reasonable plans to store the excess. The man now has ample savings to set aside so that his future is secure. Why is this man a fool? Is this not what our culture encourages us to strive for? Are we not encouraged to save for the future?

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."

So here is the punch line of the parable. In the parable, the man is talking to himself and not to God. The man does not thank God for his blessing or consider any obligations he may have as a result. The fact that it was the land that produced the bounty emphasized God's involvement. Presumably laborers were involved but the man did not share his bounty with those who helped him in the process. The man is thinking only of himself. The man who thinks he is in control of everything will realize that what is given can be easily taken away. This is what makes the man a fool.

Reflections

At the funeral of a wealthy businessman, one of the mourners asked the question, "How much did he leave?" Another mourner responded, "All of it!" Death has a way of clarifying what really matters. As much as we may resist the notion, our lives and our possessions are not our own. We are but stewards. Yet we typically spend so much of our lives seeking material security which can often lead to covetousness and self-security. In the end, and despite our best worldly efforts, we find ourselves empty or anxious. It is perhaps no surprise that the passage immediately following this one includes teaching on not being anxious (12:22-34). Our true security rests in Jesus Christ.

It is also easy to misinterpret this parable in the other direction. It is not that God does not want us to relax, eat, drink and be merry from time to time. Nor is it that God does not want us to save for retirement. At the heart of this parable is the right attitude for life: where do we place our priorities? Do our life choices and behaviors reflect that we are thinking only of ourselves, or do they show a commitment to God and neighbor? God has blessed us to be a blessing. One day Jesus' ominous words will apply to all of us: *"This night [or day] your soul is required of you."*

