

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)
Psalm 107:1-9, 43; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21
Countering greed

It wasn't uncommon for first century Palestinians to take their unsettled disputes to a rabbi for arbitration – and that's how our Gospel reading starts. A man requests Jesus to settle an argument over the division of a family inheritance. But Jesus refuses to get involved in this family squabble. Instead, he uses it to address a bigger question.

An inheritance can sometimes be a cause of division within families – though so often it isn't the inheritance per se that's the cause of conflict – it's something far deeper. It's called greed, and that's what Jesus focuses on, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

At the root of greed is the desire to possess more than what we really need. It's about wanting to acquire more and more. It's a mindset that permeates our culture and is propagated by the advertising industry. We're encouraged to gather as much as we can, though there's a paradox in greed. It's never satisfied. It's like trying to fill with water a bowl that's got a hole in it. So, when Jesus tells us to guard against all kinds of greed, he's talking about something that's ongoing – 'continually guard yourself from greed' he says.

The writer to the Colossians talks about putting greed to death, which is, he says, idolatry. The desire for more is to make that 'more' (whatever it is) a god. We want more of it because we think it will give our lives meaning. But where is true meaning to be found? Is it in the acquisition of possessions and money? No, the author to Colossians says, that can only be found in Christ, 'who is your life.'

Jesus brings this home with a parable about a rich man whose farm produced a great harvest. The man says to himself, "What can I do? I don't have a place large enough to store everything." Then he decides, "I know what I'll do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones, where I can store all my grain and other goods. Then I'll say to myself, 'You have stored up enough good things to last for years to come. Live it up! Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.'"

The man isn't doing anything evil. He hasn't cheated or stolen his wealth. We might say he's been prudent. But here's where he goes wrong – when he has this windfall, he doesn't share his good fortune with others. Instead, he becomes totally self-centred. In those few verses we hear the first-person eleven times. It's all about *me* and *mine*, and never *ours* and *theirs*. The man is filling his barns with self.

God's response is rather straightforward, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So, it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God." The man has sought his security and his future without any reference to God. It's all about 'me' and about what I've acquired. But at the end of his life, what's the man left with? He spent his life amassing possessions and wealth, but never sharing any of it, and when he faces death, he has nothing – he's 'not rich toward God.' An old saying puts it bluntly, but effectively – there are no pockets in shroud.

This story is like a mirror that's being held up in front of us, inviting us to think about where we spend our energy, where we place our priorities, how we choose to relate to others, and where we find true meaning. It raises questions about what preoccupies our thoughts and energy – where we put our trust – what matters most to us. And we might consider creating moments of reflection that

allow us to consider whether we truly need the 'next thing.' To do so may save us from being possessed by our stuff, for our possessions neither define us nor secure our future.

Jesus talks about being 'rich toward God.' He's inviting us to move our focus to the things that matter to God first, trusting in God to provide what's needed and to make room in our lives for them, for that's where we'll find rich, abundant living.

The Psalm gives a hint of how we might go about this. It's a statement of thanksgiving, 'O give thanks, for the Lord is gracious / God's steadfast love endures for ever.' This is God who, as the Psalmist goes on to say, satisfies the thirsty, and fills the hungry with good things. The last verse invites us to 'ponder these things / and consider the Lord's unfailing love.'

This reminds me of the old song, 'Count your blessings / Name them one by one / Count your blessings / See what God has done.' Naming our blessings is a simple but life changing practice. At the end of the day spend a few minutes reflecting on what's been, calling to mind those things that you choose to give thanks for. It may be as simple as a smile received, a gracious word spoken, a small act of kindness. Stay with it – share it with God. And as we recall how God has blessed us – as we give thanks for what we've been given – we move away from an ego-centric way of being and focus instead on the one thing that's lasting – 'the Lord's steadfast, unfailing love.'

Life that's rich, that has lasting meaning, is a life that focuses not on self, but on God's unfailing love – who calls us to trust that love and goodness and to share it with others... and that sharing includes the sharing of our possessions and our money.

Help me, gracious God,
to be a generous giver rather than a greedy consumer.
May I be satisfied with what you've given me
and delight in sharing it with others.

*Alister Hendery
Preached at Waiapu Cathedral – 3.8.2025*