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Pentecost 10, Proper 13

And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

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• *Lectionary Readings (Year C)*

Revised Common Lectionary

First Reading	Hosea 11:1-11 or Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14, 2:18-23
Second Reading	Colossians 3:1-11
Gospel	Luke 12:13-21
Psalm	107:1-9, 43 or 49:1-12

Luke 12:13-21

1 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family
2 inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or
3 arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all
4 kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then
5 he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought
6 to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I
7 will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all
8 my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up
9 for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very
10 night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will
11 they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich
12 toward God."

Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs

1. *The land of a rich man produced abundantly.*

What do you know about the *land*? What can you speculate?

What do you know about the *man*? What can you imagine? What difference does it make that he is *rich*? How is he feeling about his land, the world around him and himself?

And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?'

His dilemma is what? What do you imagine he might be feeling as he asks himself the question? Why do you suppose he asks *himself* and no one else?

Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.'

He answers *himself*.

Now he speaks to his *soul* rather than to *himself*. What is the difference, if there is one for you or him?

And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'

In your own words, what is the man saying to his *soul*?

“ _____ ”

But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

God now enters the conversation. Why do you suppose God calls the man a *fool*? What do you hear the man answering to God under his breath?

“ _____ ”

At the Workbench: Pentecost 10, Proper 13

Jesus now speaks: *"So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."*

"So it is. . ." How is it?

What might it mean to be *rich toward God*? What might it mean to be not *rich toward God*? How does *storing up treasures* for oneself determine whether one is *rich toward God* or not?

How might the man's life look tomorrow if he continues not being *rich toward God*? How might it be different tomorrow should he choose to become *rich toward God*?

2. What are some of the ways in which you are rich? List some of your riches:

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

What are the "barns" in which you store your "grain" and your "goods"? What have you ever known of running out of space or room in which to store them? How have you ever "pulled down" old "barns" and built larger ones?

Has there ever been a moment or period in your life when you were able to say to your soul: *"Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry"*?

Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs

Luke 12:13-21 • August 1, 2010

What have you ever known in your life about a time when you could relax, eat, drink, be merry? What was it like?

While relaxing, eating, drinking and making merry, did you ever feel as if you were being a "fool"? Have you ever felt as if all your "treasures" have kept you from being "rich toward God"?

If you were to die tonight who would have your treasures in the morning?

Should you desire to be rich towards God, what is one thing you might do with one of your treasures today? What difference might being rich toward God make in your life?

Reading Between the Lines

What dangers may lie in bounty and abundance? In recent years, how can we see our society acting like the rich man in this story, planning to pile up his possessions and to *relax, eat, drink, be merry*? In what ways could you say of our society that its *life is being demanded*? What sort of accounting can our society and economy make? As members of this society and participants in this economy, what accounting can we make for ourselves?



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My clothes fit neatly into a single dresser drawer in the tiny bedroom I shared with my two younger sisters when I was eight-years-old. The rapid rotation of those four outfits was not lost on some of my third grade classmates who felt free to ask why I always wore the same thing to school. My face burns when I recall hearing a boy from another class shout across the cafeteria to me, "Where's the flood," as I stood in line waiting to buy a carton of milk, my flowered bell bottoms several inches too short. The girls who stood on either side of me giggled in response.

The shame of that memory is still lodged within my soul—and within the two big closets that house my adult wardrobe. I now have more dresses and shoes and full-length pants than I can wear in a season. And yet I continue to buy more, wasting precious hours of my time on this earth at the mall or online ordering closet systems that promise to help me organize my bountiful harvest. Meanwhile the kingdom of God is reborn daily. The bearded irises have just bloomed in my front yard, their lilac-colored bodices and deep purple skirts more beautiful than any dress I own. By the week's end they'll be gone, the green spikes of their foliage remaining as a testament to their brief magnificence and a reminder that they will indeed rise again—just as they have every year, including the year 1974 when I was in the third grade.

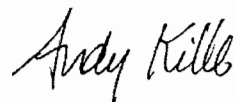


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Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?"

What might lie behind this question? What role is this someone asking Jesus to play in his dispute with his brother? What might motivate him to ask Jesus to step in? What authority might he presume Jesus to have in the situation? What effect might he assume Jesus' intervention might have on his brother?

Where in your experience have you seen someone try to use the authority of someone else to gain a desired result for themselves? When have you asked someone—a teacher, a spouse, a friend, a colleague, a pastor—to intervene on your behalf in a disagreement? What motivated you to seek their assistance? How did they respond to your request? How does it feel to have someone in authority take your side?



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Parallel Readings

From *The Owl Question*

Shopping

My husband and I stood together in the new mall
which was clean and white and full of possibility.
We were poor so we liked to walk through the stores
since this was like walking through our dreams.
In one we admired coffee makers, blue pottery
bowls, toaster ovens as big as televisions. In another,

we eased into a leather couch and imagined
cocktails in a room overlooking the sea. When we
sniffed scented candles we saw our future faces,
softly lit, over a dinner of pasta and wine. When
we touched thick bathrobes we saw midnight

swims and bathtubs so vast they might be
mistaken for lakes. My husband's glasses hurt
his face and his shoes were full of holes.
There was a space in our living room where
a couch should have been. We longed for

fancy shower curtains, flannel sheets,
shiny silverware, expensive winter coats.
Sometimes, at night, we sat up and made lists.
We pressed our heads together and wrote
our wants all over torn notebook pages.
Nearly everyone we loved was alive and we

were in love but we liked wanting. Nothing
was ever as nice when we brought it home.
The objects in stores looked best in stores.
The stores were possible futures and, young
and poor, we went shopping. It was nice
then: we didn't know we already had everything.

Faith Shearin

Faith Shearin, "Shopping"
from *The Owl Question*, (Lo-
gan, UT: Utah State Univer-
sity Press, 2002). reprinted
with permission.

From *Living Things*

Susanna

Nobody in the hospital
Could tell the age
Of the old woman who
Was called Susanna

I knew she spoke some English
And that she was an immigrant
Out of a little country
Trampled by armies

Because she had no visitors
I would stop by to see her
But she was always sleeping

All I could do
Was to get out her comb
And carefully untangle
The tangles in her hair

One day I was beside her
When she woke up
Opening small dark eyes
Of a surprising clearness

She looked at me and said
You want to know the truth?
I answered Yes

She said it's something that
My mother told me

There's not a single inch
Of our whole body
That the Lord does not love

She then went back to sleep.

Anne Porter

Anne Porter, "Susanna"
from *Living Things: Collected
Poems*, (Hanover, NH: Zo-
land Books/Steerforth Press,
2006), p. 51.

From *What Would Jesus Deconstruct ?*

But what, then, is the kingdom of God? Where is it found? It is found every time an offense is forgiven, every time a stranger is made welcome, every time an enemy is embraced, every time the least among us is lifted up, every time the law is made to serve justice, every time a prophetic voice is raised against injustice, every time the law and the prophets are summed up by love.

From time to time the figure of Jesus, or fragments of his figure, appear here or there in individual lives, showing up sometimes in people who burn with a prophetic passion, sometimes in people of inordinate compassion and forgiveness. When this happens, we are likely to mistake such people as mad or weak, which in a sense they are—mad with the folly of the cross, weak with the weakness of God.

John D. Caputo

From *The Fifth Gospel*

Gospel of Thomas

Saying 63

Jesus says: "There was a rich person who had many possessions. He said: 'I will use my possessions so that I might sow, reap, plant, (and) fill my storehouses with fruit so that I will not lack anything.' This was what he was thinking in his heart. And in that night he died. Whoever has ears should hear."

John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic/ Baker Publishing Group, 2007), p. 138.

Stephen J. Patterson and James M. Robinson, (Eds.), *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age*, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), p. 22.

Critical Background

From *Hear Then the Parable*

From Story to Kingdom

The parable implicitly invokes the kingdom of God in the harvest figure, for the miraculous harvest stands for (i.e. it is a metaphor for) the kingdom, representing God's blessing—a miracle. Its very size hints at both the tradition of a sabbatical year and Joseph's overseeing of Pharaoh's surplus and lean years. Ominously its bountifulness suggests a lean future, as both the literary parallels and the notion of limited goods indicate. While the harvest is an established metaphor for the kingdom, its very size implies the kingdom's intervention or coming.

The parable's dramatic tension results from the relation of the narrative to the metaphorical structure that represents the kingdom as a village. The part of the village system that governs the use of wealth and bounty for the community's good is the implied metaphor for the kingdom. The man's predicament is how to manage a miracle. Yet his actions run directly contrary to the injunctions of the wisdom tradition. The morality of the wisdom tradition is assumed as a guide to the way of the kingdom. The man takes the fruit of the harvest for his own benefit and attempts thereby to ward off the threat of death. But God interrupts the man's plans by announcing that on that very night he will die. This intervention confirms the moral direction of the wisdom tradition. The literary technique of the parable, with the disappearing narrator, replicates the rich man's taking over the story. His idolatry, his usurpation of story and harvest, and his crowding out all around him can only be remedied by God's intervention. All other characters have been eliminated.

The manner of God's intervention requires careful observation. First, God does not carry out the death: "They will demand your life." That those powers are ultimately divine is not contested; it may be a reference to the angel-of-death mythology. Indirection is part of the parable's strategy. The kingdom's coming is not an apocalyptic intervention; God does not seek to right the kingdom's misuse by an apocalyptic destruction of evil. Rather the man will die in his sleep! To those villagers who observe his death, it will be completely normal, carrying no special portent. They will probably give him an honorable burial as befitting a patron of the community. Only the hearer knows what really happened—what the

Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1989), pp. 138-140. Reprinted with permission.

man really planned to do. As in Luke 17:20, there will be no signs to be observed. The parable affirms the kingdom's presence in the metaphor of harvest, but it refuses to make it an apocalyptic kingdom. The man will die. Reality will continue. The fruit of the harvest is there. God's gift still must be managed! The parable's metaphor for the kingdom is not simply the harvest but the good life it is intended to produce for the community.

The parable A Man Cast Seeds (Mark 4:26-29) raises a number of interesting correlations to this parable. Both parables invoke the theme of harvest and implicitly relate the harvest to the sabbatical motif. In A Man Casts Seeds, the sabbatical presents the harvest as grace; in this parable it is bountiful grace. Further, both parables reject an apocalyptic intervention as the solution for evil. But because the Markan parable is metaphoric, the reader must interpret the quotation from Joel 4:13 that concludes the parable. In its context in Joel, the quotation indicates apocalyptic destruction; in its parabolic context it indicates peace. The hearer must decide which it is. Because this parable is metonymic, God is a direct character: the intervention is a normal death. Its point is more direct.

The story of the Land of a Rich Man reveals the deep indebtedness of the parables to the wisdom tradition. We commonly associate Jesus with a radicalization of the wisdom tradition, but this parable indicates that on the theme of wealth, Jesus is in agreement with the wisdom tradition. It is already sufficiently radical. But characteristically, Jesus' tale does not belong to a major key of the tradition, that is, the warnings against greed. The *Thomas* version of this parable has transformed the originating structure into the major key. Rather, this parable is variation in a minor key: wealth's correct usage.

The parable clearly equates the mismanagement of the miraculous harvest with idolatry. The parable parallels the sayings about the gift at the altar (Matt. 5:23-24) and the widow's mite (Mark 12:41-44). (The saying about the camel passing through the eye of a needle [Mark 10:35] is the major key.) The gift offering must be abandoned because the offerer is out of communion with his brother, and so is out of communion with God. The widow out of her need provides for the poor. Both of these sayings and the parable *The Land of a Rich Man* focus the radical identification of God's kingdom with community and the demand to provide for the needs of others. "If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?" (James 2:15-16). Or as another saying has it, "What does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mark 8:36). Yet this caring for neighbor is not based upon a moralizing or sentimentalizing principle. Not to place community first violates the First Commandment, is idolatry.

Both of these sayings and the parable The Land of a Rich Man focus the radical identification of God's kingdom with community and the demand to provide for the needs of others.

At the Workbench: Pentecost 10, Proper 13

No apocalyptic explosion will rid the world of evil; the parabolic kingdom exists only in the deeds of a loving community. The miracle must be managed.

Bernard Brandon Scott