

In the ✠ name of Jesus.

Issues of inheritance can be touchy. They're seen as issues of fairness, usually couched in terms of equality. Heirs sometimes think that they have a right to an inheritance, and they become jealous of one another if their rights are violated. Heirs plot and scheme, and, if things don't go their way, they can seek revenge. That's what happened in a story chronicled online entitled, "How an inheritance can destroy a family." (Jan 2, 2015, by Nancy J. White, Waterloo Region Record)

There's an issue of inheritance in our Gospel today. A man came up to Jesus and said, "*tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.*" He appears not to be satisfied with his portion; perhaps he was not a firstborn. According to Deuteronomy 21, the firstborn receives a double portion; others just a single portion. This man seems to want Jesus to even it up — rabbis were often called upon to mediate such things between disputants. The law, apparently, was no barrier to his desire for more.

But Jesus saw right through this request and into the heart. This was not just about fairness or rights — they usually aren't. This was about this man's covetousness: "*Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness ...*," Jesus said. After all, God issued commands regarding coveting—you know them: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house." "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." And as Luther explains about the 9th Commandment, that means "that we [should] not scheme to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, or get it in a way which only appears right."

But that's just what this man was doing. Indeed, he was far more interested in getting what was not his, than living according to God's Word. He was far more interested in receiving a temporal inheritance than an eternal one.

Jesus reminded him: "*one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*" Indeed, with these words, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God*" (Matt. 4:4), Jesus rebuked the devil. Nor is man's life found foremost in much serving as we learned along with Martha a couple weeks ago. Jesus is consistent. The true treasure is not in our possessing or in our striving. The true treasure is the one thing needful, as we heard; it's found in the Word of Christ, a word about Christ, about forgiveness and life; that's being "*rich toward God.*"

True riches are not all the things the world touts and holds before our eyes: money, possessions, status, comfort, health, eternal youth and good looks, athleticism, etc. These aren't the real treasures, but how easily our coveting eyes

are drawn to them. Indeed, when these become our treasures, Solomon, the wise Preacher and king, as he frets over the one he will leave his wealth to— “*will [he] be wise or a fool*”— Solomon rebukes us: “*all [this] is vanity and a striving after wind.*” O foolish people! Repent!

Not that toil itself has no worth. No, “*There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil,*” recognizing that this “*is from the hand of God.*” And so all of these things that have “to do with the support and needs of the body,” such as food and clothing and shelter, money and goods, health, “and the like” we classify under “daily bread” given us from God. These are surely blessings from God; and we pray that He “would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.” (Small Catechism, 4th Petition).

Nevertheless, the other things we pray for in the Lord’s Prayer, as we heard last week, have to do with the true riches from God: keeping us firm in God’s pure teaching and in faith, breaking and hindering the evil plans and purpose of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature, being forgiven when we sin, being kept from temptation and every evil that try to prevent us from hallowing “God’s name or [letting] His kingdom come.” In this way, we, who by Holy Baptism have been “*made heirs according to promise*” (Gal. 3:28) have confidence that “when our last hour comes, [He will] give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.”

With this true heavenly treasure in mind, “*set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth,*” “*you [who] have died*” and been buried with Christ by Holy Baptism, who have born again into the kingdom of God. You are a new creation; you’re wearing a new self, clothed with Christ’s own holiness; you have been “*renewed in knowledge after the image of [your] creator.*” Therefore, “*put to death ... what is earthly in you.*” “*Seek the things that are above*”; these are the true riches of God.

This is our true inheritance: not half of an earthly inheritance desired by the man in our Gospel, but the full and unending inheritance of our God in heaven. As St. Paul exhorts, “*Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward*” (Col. 3:23-24a).

The writer to the Hebrews speaks of this “*promised eternal inheritance*” inaugurated by the death of Him who has redeemed us “*from the transgressions committed under the first covenant*” (Heb. 9:15), for a will is not in effect until there is a death. The New Covenant is a covenant in the blood of Jesus. His death effects it for the world, and our baptism into His death initiates it for us, so that we are His children, heirs of God “*according to the hope of eternal life*” (Rom. 8:16-17; Tit. 3:7).

This past week, the Lord granted passage into this promised inheritance to another saint of Zion, our sister Anna Wichern. As she neared death, I shared with her this promised inheritance as St. Peter proclaims it, something far more precious than gold that perishes, he says: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls”* (1 Pet. 1:3-9).

Brothers and sisters, our hope is not in this life only; and it’s not in earthly gain. Our hope is in the Lord Jesus, in Him who died, who was raised to life on the third day, who is the first fruits for all of us who fall asleep in Him (1 Cor. 15:20). Our inheritance is found in Jesus. Abiding in Him, in His Word and Sacrament, we are laying up for ourselves an eternal treasure. God grant this to us ...

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.