

One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

Today, our hearts are hurting because of these past couple of years that have been so difficult, bombardment by fear-based news and social media, and true evils, like continued mass shootings. We come to God in prayer to make things right, to make things just and fair.

Today, Jesus our Messiah teaches us to get our focus on the right things for the sake of making things just and fair.

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

The Gospel today begins with the crowd, with someone in the crowd, asking Jesus a question. It is a kind of question we are all familiar with and can relate to: family issues, death, inheritance, fairness.

Jesus never gives an ordinary answer to questions. Jesus usually answers a question with a question. And when he does that, it is his way of saying, "you've asked the wrong question, let me help you out."

But Jesus said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?"

This is odd, because, of course, Jesus is the messiah. The messiah is just exactly the person that God has set up to be a judge and arbitrator between people! Judgment is exactly what someone in the crown would be expecting of Jesus.

The kind of judge that God's people were expecting before Jesus came was not a judge presiding over a criminal court. It is not a hell-fire judgement day that we were hoping for.

Rather, judgement day is more like a civil court. God would make things fair and right between nations, families, and people. It was not about condemnation for sin as much as evening things out and righting inequity. So, again, it makes sense that someone in the crowd would ask Jesus this kind of question – if he is the messiah, after all.

But Jesus often upsets our expectations of him. Jesus redefines what messiah means. And he stirs things up in the process.

After answering the question with a question, Jesus returns to teaching in his two most typical forms: aphorisms, and parables. First, the aphorism:

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."

So here we are. We have asked the messiah, God's appointed judge, to make things right and fair in our family. And now Jesus, the one we our hoping to be our messiah, the one to set things right, uses our question as an opportunity to teach folks not to be greedy.

Well that is just great. Thanks very much. You are implying that I am greedy. I get it Jesus. I came to you for help. All I want is for things to be fair!

But it is true. One's life does not depend upon the abundance of possessions. We can get so obsessed with fairness with equity, that we become like the child who is always crying out "but it's not fair." We forget what justice is for.

Justice isn't about material objects per se. It is about relationship. It is the balance we need so that right relationship can happen between God and human beings. Jesus is asking us to refocus.

In asking Jesus to arbitrate our family will and inheritance, we are asking him to focus on material things that are passing away, rather than on the relationships, the persons, that will live on into the life of the age to come: we need to focus on the right things to make things just and fair.

Now comes the second major way that Jesus teaches:

Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?'"

Now the first question is just fine: what should I do with all this abundance? But the obvious answer to the first question here is, I will share my abundance with my neighbors. By the time he asks where he is going to store things up, he is already off the rails.

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

This is not a parable saying to us: give up your life's savings. Don't worry about your retirement. Etc. Those kinds of ways of providing for ourselves after our working years have ended are not a part of the way that ancient economies worked in Jesus' day.

In our own day, this is about excessive storing, guarding, hoarding. This is always a sign of fear. Building up riches that are never shared. And we see a lot of that in our day. And we see it crop up in our own lives and the lives of those we love in

hoarding and other neurotic habits. Will there be enough for me?
We worry.

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?'

"You can't take it with you," as they say. The man is a fool because his thoughts about abundance are those of storing and hoarding, rather than sharing and passing on. This is because the man sees the abundance as his own, rather than God's gift.

Because he sees it as his own, and he is finite, he sees it as scarce and fragile.

But if it is a gift of God, there is no end to it, because God has no end. If we receive an abundance, it is just our turn to pass it on. Some time or another, it will be someone else's turn and we will be the recipients.

So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.

We all have some kind of abundance given us by God. And our duty – our calling – our joy – is to pass it on. In turn, we will have the joy of receiving the gifts of other's abundance from God.

So, surprisingly, as is so often the case, Jesus *did* perform his role as the righteous judge and messiah on the last day. He has judged us: keep your focus on what is real and then things will be fair.

Focus on relationships and persons, not on those things that are passing away. Focus on passing along the abundance God has given you.

In a few moments folks will come by to collect gifts of our abundance. In some ways literally, in some ways symbolically: money in cash or check represents the fruit of our labor.

We also lift up and give back to God our very hearts. All of our gifts and talents, we offer them in service to the Lord at the altar of our Lord.

We bring forth bread and wine and give it away. And when we do, it comes back to us more than we can ask for or imagine: the body of Christ, the bread of heaven; the blood of Christ, the cup of salvation.

The Eucharist allows us to practice our faith, to ritually enact our focus on love of God and neighbor, on infinitude, gratitude, genuine relationship and sharing.

Let's try something concrete this week to bring Christ's gospel and Christ's table into our lives. Let's try a little prayer technique in our Christian practice. Try this with me: gratitude list or notecard. EXPLAIN

Today, our hearts are hurting because of these past couple of years that have been so difficult, bombardment by fear-based news and social media, and true evils, like continued mass shootings. We come to God in prayer to make things right, to make things just and fair. We cry out: how long?

There are no easy answers, and I will not try to give one. But I believe this: If we live as Christians, and keep our focus on: love of God and neighbor, then Jesus our righteous judge will show up, again and again, and surprise us with the way he sets things right and makes things fair. Amen.