

Gospel of Luke Chapter 12: 13-21

13 Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.' ¹⁴But Jesus said to him, 'Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?' ¹⁵And 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.' ¹⁶Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" ¹⁸Then 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. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." ²⁰But 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?" ²¹So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Galileo Galilee, when you hear his name do you think brilliant scientist or ruthless heretic? When Galileo was put on trial for his heliocentric theory that said the earth revolved around the sun his persecutors in the Catholic Church refused to look into his telescope. Galileo told them the evidence was in front of their eyes but they stated that the only evidence they needed could be found in the bible. The bible says, in Psalm 93:1, Psalm 96:10, and 1 Chronicles 16:30, "the world is firmly established, it cannot be moved." Psalm 104:5 says, "the Lord set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved." Ecclesiastes 1:5 states that "the sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises."¹ The Catholic theologians had a snapshot in front of them that explained how the universe worked and they refused to look beyond that picture.

When you have an unfamiliar snapshot in front of you it is difficult to be able to really know what is going on with the people in the photograph. Were they told to put their arms around each other and smile or did it happen naturally? Did the candid moment capture their true feelings or simply catch them off guard? Was the setting important or coincidental? When you have a snapshot but you don't have the background information to fill in the gaps it is difficult at best to be able to see the big picture.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galileo_affair

So here is today's biblical snapshot: we have a man who claims to have been cheated out of his share of the family inheritance by his brother. That is all we know about the situation. So...do you sympathize with the man? Do you trust the man and what he tells you? Do you defend him and help him get his share of the money? Do you ignore the man because it really has nothing to do with you?

This was the situation put before Jesus one day while he was teaching. A man interrupted him to ask Jesus to tell his brother to share his family inheritance with him. Jesus did not want to be like the theologians who judged from a snapshot without being able to see the whole scene. And so instead of acting as an arbitrator like the man wanted him to do, Jesus told him a story of another man.

The rich farmer Jesus places in his teaching parable makes several mistakes. Winter is coming and his fall harvest is going to be huge. He is a wealthy man but still his barns will not hold all that he is about to reap. And so, considering nothing beyond his simple snapshot, he decides he will tear down his old barns and build new barns that will be bigger, large enough to store the crops. Snapshot mistakes. The man has enough already to get him through the winter but he decides he will not bring his excess crops to the market at harvest time to sell. Instead he will store them until winter shortages come for others and he will be

able to get a better price for his goods. Snapshot into his greed. Secondly, the man lives in an agricultural economy; it is one which relies on the interconnectedness of the community in order to survive and sustain its production.² The man though makes his decisions about tearing down his barns and building new ones without considering how it will affect the community. Snapshot into his selfishness. Lastly, the man never considers tithing or offering from his abundance to the village or to God. He considers his own needs and wants. He says, “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.” Snapshot into his egocentrism.

But Jesus has a different ending to this story than that man envisioned for his future. He was planning on a long prosperous life but what the snapshot could not show was that the man never lives to build his barns, or harvest his crops, or enjoy his abundance. The man lost perspective because he got caught up in the moment of his extravagance. He did not consider his community, he did not consider the culture, he did not

² Green, Joel. The Gospel of Luke: The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997. pg. 490-492.

consider God. His perspective was locked into that one snapshot that showed him reaping the benefits of his abundant wealth.

Jesus carefully responds to the first man's situation with another man's situation. Jesus will not solve his problem for him but attempts to offer him some perspective. Will you compromise the relationship with your brother over some money? Will you quarrel over money you may never live to spend? Will you go against the culture of your community for your own selfish desires? Step back from your snapshot and look at the big picture.

Sometimes the only way to step back from our individual realities is to be shown another's. I am sure all of you had this exact experience this week. Going about your Wednesday evening, making dinner, driving home from work, taking the kids to the park...when suddenly your snapshot was interrupted by another, that of a bridge falling into the water, cars in the river, and bodies on stretchers. A new snapshot instantly brings you out of your own...you think about your family, your priorities, your community, your church, your faith. A sobering dose of perspective.

It is easy to get stuck in your own scenario absorbed in your problems and routines, quickly losing perspective. But when you are stuck in

your own snapshot you make mistakes, like our rich farmer did. You make bad decisions letting your priorities get skewed. You hold onto grudges instead of offering forgiveness. You make things into bigger issues than they need to be. You forget the people around you. But that is just the thing about snapshots, they are just snapshots. And you cannot get your priorities in line without the big picture. You cannot understand a problem, or a person, or a bible passage without the background, the history, every moment leading up to it. You need to be able to see the big picture and that is what Jesus was trying to show the man complaining about his inheritance. Step back from your snapshot and take a look at the big picture.

It wasn't until 1992 that the Catholic Church recanted their position against Galileo and his theories. Pope John Paul II made this remark, "Thanks to his intuition as a brilliant physicist and by relying on different arguments, Galileo...understood why only the sun could function as the centre of the world...The error of the theologians of the time, when they maintained the centrality of the earth, was to think that our understanding of the physical world's structure was, in some way, imposed by the literal sense of Sacred Scripture."³ The theologian's error came because of their lack of perspective and their inability to step

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galileo_affair

out of their own snapshots...they refused to look into Galileo's telescope and see the big picture.

We do not know what the man who summonsed Jesus help decided to do about his inheritance and his brother, the story is left unresolved for us. But the question comes back to each of us. This week Minnesotan's have had their snapshots shuffled, they have been given sobering perspective, they have been given the chance to look into a telescope and see the big picture. Will you take the perspective offered and act upon it in your own life? Make that apology. Right that wrong. Work harder on that relationship. Get involved in that cause. Confront that situation. Kick that habit. Will you use the opportunity to change your own life or will you wait like our rich farmer until it is too late? Jesus offers us perspective and our job is to decide what we will do with that gift. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow has a wonderful quote which speaks to our rich farmer's situation and perhaps to our own. "Trust no future, however pleasant! Let the dead past bury its dead! Act, - act in the living Present! Heart within and God overhead."

Amen.