

classic and collectible cars, and then spent hundreds of thousands more dollars building barns to store the cars. The man died penniless and in deep debt; his heirs quickly decide to auction the collection, car by car, to clear his debts. The car collection that took a lifetime and a fortune to amass, was sold off in two days for about half a million dollars. It's a sad story, really: the man was a passionate collector of antique cars, but his heirs didn't appreciate the legacy bequeathed to them.

This story came to mind because it sounds so similar to the story of the man in Luke 12 who approached Jesus and asked him to mediate a family dispute. There is an inheritance at stake and the man wants his fair share. Jesus uses the opportunity to tell a parable about our heavenly inheritance.

God blessed a man with fertile ground which yielded abundant crops. The man built a series of barns to store his crops. His new found wealth securely stowed, the man decided to sit back and enjoy life: to eat, drink and be merry. But that very night God demanded the man's life. He died without being able to enjoy the rewards of his labors. He invested in things that do not last; he put his hope and trust in the things of the world.

Is it any different for us? How many of us carefully watch our 401K or diversify our portfolio to guard against the whims of the stock market? How many of us invest in homes and cars and other collectibles, setting them aside as insurance against a rainy day? And when do we have enough put away? When will we feel free, as the rich man did, to sit back and enjoy the fruits of our labors?

We like to think that someday we'll be able to take it easy, that someday things will be easier and we won't have to pinch the pennies so hard. It's a very human thought. And, if we're honest, I'm sure each of us has considered what we might do if we receive an unexpected inheritance. What would you do? Pay off the house? Put your kids through college? Buy a new car? Take a trip around the

world? It's fun to fantasize, but fantasies won't get you very far (something the rich farmer in the parable realized too late). His dream to kick back and relax, his barns bursting with the harvest, couldn't help him when God demanded his life.

God demanded his life. That's an odd phrase. There are two thoughts here: first, God as the author and creator of all life has the right to demand that life back whenever and wherever God chooses; second, we are given this life and asked to make something of it, and God will demand an accounting for what we've done with the gift of life we've been given. Either way, the man was caught unprepared when God came calling and his wealth proved a poor guarantee for life.

In truth we are never fully prepared for life; something unexpected always happens. Being human, there really is nothing we can do to be ready for every eventuality. Being mortal there is little we can do to protect ourselves against death. But the good news is that we don't have to prepare for death, because God is preparing us for life: eternal life.

We each have an inheritance from God. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven and redeemed: we are made children of God and thus inheritors of the eternal life. That inheritance is one that no one and nothing can ever take from us. Christ died once, for all, for the forgiveness of sins and for the grace we need to enjoy the kingdom of God. This is an inheritance we can count on, an inheritance we can take all the way to the bank.

Jesus tells the man seeking his inheritance that "one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (v. 15). Jesus ends the parable with the words: "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God" (v. 21). It is what we do with the spiritual gifts we're given that matters. How we spend the inheritance of love and grace that God offers is the truest indicator of life. Jesus demands that we pass such blessings to others because we are merely stewards, guardians of what we've been given. As the rich

man discovered, all life and faith is a gift from God: it's ours for a time and then we pass it along to others. And what greater gift could we pass along than a spiritual inheritance that embraces the love and grace and eternal life of God?

We are, of course, in the stewardship season and so I'm asking you to consider the lessons of the rich man and his barns. The things of this world are short-lived, but the things of God are eternal. Set yourself free from the things of this world in order that you might be free to inherit the things of God. Be free from the riches that fade and be free instead to be rich toward God.

An inheritance is riches that we pass on to the next generation; riches of wisdom, grace, compassion and yes, wealth. God gave grace and forgiveness and new life to our ancestors, they passed it on to us, and now we have this treasure to pass on to our children and grandchildren. We are blessed to be a blessing to others. We have an incredible inheritance to impart, an inheritance that doesn't collect dust or rot or mold or fade, but one that gives life, and life eternal.

In his parable, Jesus is asking more than simply, "What's in your barn?" He is asking each one of us, "What's in your heart?" Consider the inheritance you could impart by supporting the missions and ministries of The Federated Church. Think how you might pay forward the blessings you received from God. Think how you might be free from riches in order to be rich toward God.

Prayer: All Powerful and Ever-Living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks. All things are of your making. All times and seasons obey you. You chose to create us in your own image and to set us over all the whole world in all its wonder. You made us the stewards of creation, to praise you every day for your wisdom and power. May we imitate your son, Jesus, in his life of service. May we be faithful stewards of all your gifts to us. May we pass on your glorious inheritance of love and grace and truth. Amen.

# Free to Inherit

**Sunday, October 11, 2015**

**The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN**

## **Luke 12:13-21**

When I was in my early twenties, my Great Aunt Harriet died. She was one of the central figures of my childhood. Aunt Harriet visited us occasionally, always staying for about a week, and the things I remember most about her visits were the peanut butter cookies she baked and the hours crocheting afghans while she watched soap operas on television. Aunt Harriet was a widow and had no children: so she doted on her nieces and nephews, including my father, and her expanding gaggle of grand nieces and nephews.

When Aunt Harriet died, she divided her estate between her nieces and nephews. My father chose to share his part of the inheritance with my sister and with me. I used my portion to buy my piano. It was a real gift to be able to purchase that piano; I never could have done it without Aunt Harriet's money. That unexpected legacy continues to bless our family as my children are now learning to play the piano.

Sometimes, however, an inheritance turns out to be a burden. Some people are quick to trade in their inheritance, to liquidate an estate for cash, and to turn a legacy into a memory. The new reality show called "Strange Inheritance" (Fox Business Network) chronicles the odd things people inherit: doll collections, an amusement park, an alligator farm, a winery, a 300-year-old Stradivarius cello, the personal effects of General Custer, and some personal letters from President John F. Kennedy.

In one memorable episode, a man's family inherits his vast car collection. The man spent hundreds of thousands of dollars buying