

11th Sunday after Pentecost

August 23,1992

Two sisters. Maggie and Pauline. When Pauline's child was sick and dying, for almost a year Maggie left her own life to come to live with Pauline's family and care for the child. Real sisters.

But now Mom had died. Maggie had been living with Mom for many years caring for her until her death in her 92nd year. For fifteen years her mother's house had been her home while she helped her Mom - washed and cooked and drove her everywhere she needed to go.

But now Mom had died. The will said the house along with all the property would be divided between the six branches of the family that had descended from Mom, three living children, the families of the three that had died before Mom.

And Maggie suddenly had no home of her own. And two sisters who had talked every day of more than sixty years were talking no longer.

I knew that if we just sat down and talked it out, Pauline, Maggie and I, that a decision could be reached, justice could be done and sisters could be sisters again.

Maggie talked, and Pauline talked. Maggie talked, and Pauline talked. For four hours we went round and round. And absolutely nothing was accomplished. I thought I could do what Jesus would not attempt. I was foolish.

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

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

How many times I've gone right by Jesus' question and never given it an answer. Who set Jesus to be a judge or arbitrator over this man? God did. Jesus is judge over every one. Yet Jesus would not judge that case. For something greater than justice was at stake.

O, Jesus could have said, "Your brother must divide with you." Jesus could have consulted God's law and made sure everyone got their fair share. But he did not. Instead he wanted the man who came to him to look into his own heart and change what was there. "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions."

"Give me my rights!" the man was demanding. Jesus was answering, "Forget your rights, and go after what is really important."

I wonder how many dollars a man who had no brother would spend to get a brother. How much is a sister worth who would set aside her own life to come and care for your dying child? Could such love be bought for a thousand dollars, a hundred thousand, a million?

"The land of a rich man produced abundantly," Jesus said. "And he thought to himself, 'What should I do for I have no place to store my crops?' 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 soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, and be merry.'

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?'"

The man was alone. Every word he spoke was to himself. All that he did was for himself. God judged him a fool.

Things are ours just for a time. Things of beauty, and comfort, money that makes us feel powerful and secure, they are all just for a time.

And the time is short. Before we know it, it seems almost over.

But love is for eternity. Love for God, love for our neighbor is an eternal treasure.

Maggie and Pauline have long since died. The house has other people living in it. The money of the inheritance has been spent. For Maggie and Pauline everything they were willing to trade their love for is dust.

Do they still have each other? Does God still call them his daughters? Are they still sisters, now in a more profound and lasting way? I hope so. I hope they did not harden their hearts for eternity because of dust. Greed.

Take care! Jesus says to you. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

Every day, in every moment our Lord wants us to live for what is eternal. The love we give and receive is a lasting treasure. The forgiveness we offer to those who stomp on our rights, is a jewel that death will not destroy. While all the barns we build to store what we do not even need, the energy and worry we invest in making sure that we will be better off than our neighbor, the hurts and grudges we nurse in our hearts, these will all be counted as loss.

Take care! Live for true riches.

Your Lord had no barns to store his grain, not even a kernel of grain to store in them. On the cross, he had not even a thread of clothing to cover his nakedness. But God has declared that there, giving his own life for those he loved that Jesus was richer than any other has ever been. For his wealth is you and I who love our Lord. His wealth is our worship and praise for all eternity. When all the gold and the silver and the diamonds are no longer even a memory we shall be kneeling before him, full of joy beyond any we have known and love perfect, pure.

Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. Amen.