

Wesley United Methodist Church

July 31, 2016

“Fighting Over Daddy’s Will.”

Luke 12:13-21

Permit me to do a little prying. It’s for your own benefit. How many of you have a will? You don’t have to raise your hands, but it could be an important question for many of us. Many family squabbles have erupted over the lack of a well-thought-out will.

There are some interesting wills from Japan. Listen to a few of these:

“My dream was to climb a 3,000 meter mountain with the two of you, my children, but to this date, it hadn’t come true. Take a look at the pictures of mountains I have taken. If you can find one that looks beautiful, try climbing it for me. And please take good care of your mother.” Shochi Nakamura 45,

Here’s a good one: “The list of my assets is stored in my computer hard disk. If you want to avoid family troubles, you’d better turn on the computer now, and pull it out. I’ve set the deadline, so the data will be destroyed if you wait too long.” Masahiko Hosokawa, 41

One more: “Pick the red roses from the garden and use them to decorate my funeral. Put the number of roses that match my age inside the coffin. I have never put make-up on my face. Make sure I won’t be made up by the undertaker. Well, since I’ll be meeting your father and some good friends up there, I’ll let you apply that orange lipstick, but just a little.” Noriko Kamokawa, 41

Most American wills are probably not that colorful. Recently, however, I heard a shocking true story that was told by an estate planner. A certain very wealthy man, we call him Mr. Smith, died in Tennessee. His attorney was working on settling the estate when he received a telephone call from the IRS. “What about the one million-dollar life insurance on Mr. Smith’s life?” asked the IRS agent. “What life insurance policy?” Mr. Smith’s attorney answered honestly. He had no idea the policy existed. It seems that unknown to any of his family or friends, Mr. Smith had a mistress. He had taken out a one million-dollar life insurance and named her as the beneficiary. Now here’s the punch line: Because the way Mr. Smith’s will was written, not only did the mistress collect the one million dollars, but Mr. Smith’s widow had to pay the taxes on the one million dollars. True story. See your attorney if you have any significant assets. It can matter very much how a will is written. A poorly drawn up will can cause a massive headache to those left behind.

Jesus encountered a family plagued with inheritance problems. He was teaching one day when someone called from the crowd, “Sir, please tell my brother to divide my father’s estate with me.” Now we are not given the juicy details behind this family controversy. Maybe Papa died without leaving a will. Or perhaps there was some cheating as in the story of Jacob and Esau. However, the man’s request was not totally out of line. Jewish rabbis were often called to serve as judges and settle disputes. But Jesus replied, “Man, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?” Beware! Don’t always be wishing for what you don’t have. For real life and real living are not related to how rich we are.” Then Jesus proceeds to tell the story of the rich fool.

You know the story as well as I. A rich man had barns that were overflowing. He decided to build bigger ones! He said to himself, “Friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Wine, women, and song for you.” But God said to him, “Fool! Tonight you die. Then who will get it all?” Jesus concluded, “Yes, every man is a fool who gets rich on earth, but not in heaven.”

Money can be a blessing or a curse. Family members who have quit talking to one another because of a contested will are evidence that money can be a curse. And all of us have seen people who had abundant wealth but it wasn’t enough.

The critical difference between money as a blessing or a curse is whether money is a means or an end. Is money our servant or our master? Is it our tool or our tyrant?

The way to tell whether money is an end or a means is how we distribute it. Do we use it only for our own satisfaction or do we use it to bless the lives of others? Money that is used for a high and noble purpose brings the greatest ultimate satisfaction. Let me tell you a great American success story.

Andras Grof was born and raised in Budapest, Hungary, where his boyhood was continually marked by tragedy. At the age of four, Andras contracted a raging case of scarlet fever. He barely survived and lost most of his hearing to the effects of the disease. Andras was often picked on for being a Jew, but it wasn’t until 1944 that his ethnicity became deadly. It was that year that Nazi forces began rounding up Budapest’s Jews and sending them off to concentration camps. Andras’ father was taken away and sent to a labor camp. He and his mother hid out with a Christian family. They survived the war. In 1956, the Soviet army began taking over Budapest, and Andras knew it was only a matter of time before they, too, would begin persecuting and killing Jews. So he and a friend fled Hungary. By train, they traveled to just outside Austria. Aided by a hunchback smuggler, they walked across fields and hid in forests until they made it safely into Austria.

Aided by the International Rescue Committee, Andras came to America, where he started a whole new life. With the committee's help, he bought the best hearing aid on the market. He entered the City College of New York, where he was an excellent student. He also married and started a family. And in his new country, Andras found success with Capital S! Today, Andras Grof is known worldwide as Andrew Grove, the head of Intel, the world's leading manufacturer of microprocessors. Colleagues and employees speak of him as brilliant, hardworking, visionary, and a kind man. A man of integrity, with a commitment to excellence. His net worth is estimated at \$300 million plus.

Andrew Grove and his wife have two daughters, and some day they plan to leave their girls a small inheritance. But the bulk of their fortune will be split up in three ways: some of it will go to create chemistry scholarships at the City College of New York; some of it will go to fund prostate cancer research (Grove was diagnosed with the condition); and some of it will go to the International Rescue Committee, the organization that helped a young refugee start his life over.

Andy Grove was no fool. He was a successful businessman. Even more important, he was making certain his money is used for something greater than himself. Andrew Grove died on March 21, 2016 at the age of 79.

That is a good lesson for us. You and I do not have the millions that Andy Grove has, but we can have the same satisfaction with what we have that he did with his wealth. By giving to our church we can make sure that our money is being used for a great and worthy cause, the sharing of Jesus Christ with our community and our world.

A man comes to Jesus and asked him to settle a family dispute about a contested will. Jesus responds with a parable about a rich fool. And in the process he teaches us that money can be a blessing or a curse depending upon whether it is our servant or our master. And we see that the greatest use we can make of our material possessions is to give them something that will live on after we are gone.