

Gimmee, Gimmee. Gimmee **Proper 13, Year C – Luke 12:13-21**

Preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, August 4, 2013

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee.

The Martindale family car when I was a young teenager was a 1969 Ford LTD Country Squire. Now, some of you know about that venerable road cruiser, but for those of you that are less informed about mid-century road culture, the Country Squire was less a car than it was a land yacht. Ours was one of the largest cars ever built, at the very top of the evolution of the American station wagon before the SUV was a twinkle in its designer's eye. It weighed in at forty-three hundred pounds, well over two tons of solid Pittsburg sheet steel. It was driven by Ford's 429 cubic inch, *seven* liter V8 with the power of 365 horses. Ours was painted in midnight blue, with faux wood paneling running the nineteen-foot length of each flank and across the vaunted "Three-Way Magic Doorgate" in the back.

It was *huge*, and it was *smooth*, and every Martindale kid had his or her assigned space. In its "Age of Aquarius" configuration, the LTD Country Squire was outfitted to seat ten passengers, so our family of seven had plenty of room. Dave and Doug, the youngest of us, were relegated to the center facing fold-up seat in the far rear, each of which was theoretically able to accommodate two people, if they were small enough and could somehow fold their knees out of the way. Dad at the wheel and Mom riding shotgun, left the middle portion of the front bench for carrying everything from potluck casseroles to travel treats. And that left me, Danny and Becky in the six foot wide second bench, me on the left behind Dad, Danny at the other window behind Mom, and Becky, "Why do I always have to sit on the hump?" in the center. You do remember when cars had humps, don't you? The vinyl of the bench seat was stitched in such a way that the seat was divided into sections, and from the moment we first claimed our places, we each knew where our three sections began, and where they ended.

That didn't keep us from arguing about it, though, especially on the annual pilgrimages back and forth from Phoenix to west-central Ohio. After a few hundred miles along what back then still included portions of Route 66, one or another of us would begin making accidental incursions, or deliberate provocations, on the established territory of the others. Not me, of course – as I've told you many times, I was nearly a *model* child. Anyway, we would poke or prod, or just lean over the lines without *technically* touching any rival territory, until someone would holler up to the front seat for intervention from the authorities. Sometimes things had escalated too far, or too *nosily*, precipitating a response from behind the wheel, "Don't make me pull over this car!" More often, though, the whole exercise ended with the aggrieved party whining, "Make him give me my part of the seat!" Mine, mine, mine. Gimmee, gimmee, gimmee.

When we get to this morning's portion from Luke's Gospel, Jesus has been preaching and teaching about hypocrisy. He's been talking about hell and sin, repentance and forgiveness. But apparently, this guy in the crowd didn't hear a word of it. This guy in the crowd had a problem that so distracted him that he could think of nothing else. He shouts out, "Teacher, get my brother to divide the inheritance with me." For the second time in just a little while, Jesus is thrust into a family disagreement. First it was Martha and Mary. Now it's this guy. Jesus isn't having it, so he tells them a story.

In a lot of Bibles, Jesus' story is labeled, "The Parable of the Rich Fool," but I don't know. He seems like a pretty reasonable guy to me. He's done everything he's supposed to do. He hasn't stolen anything. He hasn't cheated anyone. He's prudent with his resources. The only thing that earns him approbation, the only reason ends up having God call this character a fool, is that it's all about him. "My crops." "My barns." "My grain." "My goods." "I will say to my soul, Soul... relax, eat, drink, be merry." Mine, mine, mine. How ridiculous is that? He worried about some things, and totally disregarded others.

Gimmee, gimmee, gimmee. Now, that's why he was called a fool. "Watch out," Jesus tells the crowd of us, "for all *kinds* of greed." "Some things," he says, "are just more important than others."

In my sixteenth year, I learned to drive in that '69 Country Squire. Driving the family to church the first time, me behind the wheel, Daddy riding shotgun, and Mom white-knuckling in *my* usual place, I first knew the joy of responsibility for other people's safety. My first accident happened less than a block away from home, when those 365 horses tried a slow-speed climb up the side of a telephone pole as I turned the wheel too far and forgot which pedal was which. And to the apparent astonishment of the proctor, and the *very* apparent pride of my father, I got my license when I had parallel parked that behemoth. Long before any of that, though, I had learned a different sort of lesson, sitting in the backseat of that Country Squire.

We were on one of our visits to our friends the Faulkners, who were missionaries on the San Carlos Apache Reservation, sometimes called "Hell's Forty Acres," for a lot of seriously pathetic reasons. The LTD was kicking up a cloud of dust rolling down a dirt road with absolutely nothing in any direction, when Dad pulled up short next to a pair of boys walking along the side of the road. The older of the two was about my age, maybe thirteen or fourteen, and wore a battered pair of sneakers with no laces. Piggyback fashion, he was carrying the younger boy, maybe nine or ten years old, who had some sort of malformation of his bare feet. Their dark faces had the familiar Chiricahua features, more angular than on the northern reservations, their longish hair obviously as home-cut as my own. Both wore older looking T-shirts and worn, faded jeans, a couple sizes too small.

Dad rolled down the window and asked in the anglicized form of a native greeting, "How long is your road, newpew?" The boy stopped walking as if he had just noticed us there with our air-conditioned seven-liter roar, and our cloud of dust. He smiled at my father with respectful recognition, and replied, "Not far, now, uncle." "Our home is..." he looked forward and back down the road at landmarks I sure didn't see, "only two miles more." "Will you ride with *us* for two miles?" Dad asked. The older boy craned his head to look at his brother who smiled and nodded eagerly. "We will ride, uncle," the older boy said, and Dad had me get out to help them into those spare back seats with my brothers.

Following the older boy's directions down a side trail we probably would never have used, Dad pulled up before their home, a small travel trailer that had long ago lost any mobility, with an attached brush summer-house arbor covered in well tended vines. As Dad went to open the tailgate, a couple of smaller children came to see what was going on, and to stare in awe at our machine. The older boy lifted his brother into his arms and carried him to a seat under the arbor before returning to my father, "Thank you for our journey, uncle," he said, "what may I give you?" My father seemed to be deliberately considering for a moment. "Another smile, nephew," he said as he took his seat behind the wheel of our 1969 Ford LTD Country Squire, "for your brother."

I'm not sure *exactly* when it happened, but somewhere in those two miles, I stopped caring quite so much about my three sections of vinyl car seat. Some things, it seems, are just more important than others.