

Wealth to share

By [Rhonda Mawhood Lee](#)

July 29, 2013

*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Lee's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” Most of us can identify with that request. It’s only fair: each member should receive their own portion of a family’s wealth when the time comes to divide it.

But Jesus doesn’t seem to care about fairness. Not only does he refuse to get involved in this family dispute, he also warns anyone who will listen to be on guard against greed. What you and I consider simple fairness, Jesus calls greed: a voracious appetite that can never be satisfied and will leave us empty in the end.

Accepting Jesus’ redefinition of our human desire raises some questions. What might life look like if we lived it not in the pursuit of fairness but taking care to resist greed? What are the markers of a heart that is rich toward God? How can we gain the freedom needed to stop asking Jesus to represent us against our rich brother or sister?

In Durham, North Carolina, where I live, new monastic communities are working out answers to those questions. Members of Rutba House and the Community of the Franciscan Way share homes, food and cars. They receive alms gratefully, and they pray together several times a day on behalf of themselves and the world.

Members of these communities will tell you that life together can be hard. It takes years to build up the trust required to deposit hard-earned paychecks into a joint bank account that an errant member could, theoretically, empty overnight. It takes humility for a New Testament scholar and a long-unemployed carpenter to accept the gifts each other has to offer. It requires generosity to welcome all who arrive

seeking coffee and conversation, the Eucharist, or a safe place to rest.

I don't live in a house of hospitality, but my friends who do are some of my most gifted teachers of the way of Jesus. We bless each other—not through a fair exchange of goods and services, but simply by sharing what we have: necessities like toilet paper, luxuries like wine, homemade pickles and spaghetti sauce, prayer and Communion. My relationship with these sisters and brothers affects how I spend my money and time, how I pray and how I read the newspaper.

With their help, I have begun to imagine a church where all are heirs of both material and spiritual wealth, and all become richer by sharing it.