

# NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost – October 20th, 2024 (11:11 am)

## MONEY AND RICHNESS

*Psalm 119:9-16*  
*Ecclesiastes 5:10-20*  
*Hebrews 4:1-16*  
**Mark 10:23-31**

### ***By the Voluntary Poverty of Christ, We Enter the Kingdom of God***

To love and trust in earthly wealth is vanity. For nothing of this earth will last forever, nor can any of it grant eternal life (Eccl. 5:10). But the one who trusts in God is *“occupied with joy in his heart”* and is able to sleep in peace, *“whether he eats little or much,”* because he knows that the *“days of his life”* are *“the gift of God”* (Eccl. 5:12, 18–20). The person who trusts in riches cannot sleep, because he *“shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand”* (Eccl. 5:15). Therefore, it is difficult *“for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God”* (Mark 20:23). Indeed, it is impossible for man, yet *“all things are possible with God”* (Mark 20:27). Thus, the Rich Man, Jesus Christ, has made Himself poor and has gone through *“the eye of a needle,”* through death and the grave, *“to enter the kingdom of God”* on our behalf (Mark 20:24–25). He is the *“great high priest who has passed through the heavens”* (Heb. 4:14), so that we may now enter His Sabbath rest by faith in His forgiveness (Heb. 4:3–9).

Today's readings from Ecclesiastes and Mark speak strongly about money or material things. I chose to preach on Mark because it challenges each of us about our relationship with our money and our faith. Most of us know this story as the story of the rich young ruler, although Mark is the only one who suggests he is rich, Matthew is the only one who says he is young, and Luke is the only one who calls him a ruler.

As Jesus is leaving on his journey to Jerusalem, an anxious young man approaches him. This man seems to be an ideal candidate to be a disciple of Jesus. He kneels before Jesus and asks, *“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

His question shows his great respect for Jesus and his interest in eternal matters. His idea is that he can “inherit” eternal life. This word was chosen because it reflects the Jewish tradition that eternal life was often seen as a given, as something inherited by being born to the right people. ***For the Jews, belonging to God's people was a matter of RACE. For Jesus, belonging to God's people was a matter of GRACE.***

Instead of directly answering this man's question, Jesus first focuses on that reference to “goodness.” He replies, *“Why do you call me good? No one is good except one – God.”* Then Jesus listed some of the Ten Commandments. And, so, he swiftly insists, *“Teacher, I have observed all these things from my youth.”* (v. 20).

Here was a man who had likely found the emptiness of success. He had exactly the things most of us think will bring us happiness.

Perhaps we think that wealth and obedience will bring us happiness because we don't have both. But here is a man who has both, and he has discovered the emptiness of such efforts. He is still looking, so he comes to Jesus for answers and the true meaning of life.

It is when Mark gives us a moving picture of Jesus that He really understood this man. Mark likes to add comments about Jesus "seeing" or "looking," and he often says what Jesus was feeling at any given time. Here he combines these things by noting: "**Jesus, looking at him, loved him.**"

Jesus loves this young man because He can immediately tell that he is serious about his quest. No wonder Jesus loves him. He is mature. He's ready for God. He's come to the end of what he can do for himself, the end of what money can do for him, and the end of what the law can do for him. Jesus knew he would make an excellent disciple, but one thing was missing.

Although Jesus claims that man lacks "one thing", He gives him two commands. First, he must go, sell what he has and give everything to the poor. Second, he must come and follow Jesus - a path that will lead him to the eternal life he seeks.

**You see, the opposite of rich is not poor. The opposite of rich is free. He was not free to hold Jesus' hand because his hand was too full of his things and his love for things. He might as well have a ball and chain around his leg. He was not free to follow Jesus.**

In fact, the meaning of "rich" may have less to do with how much money someone has, than with our attitude toward the money we have. Some people have a lot of money, but they are not enslaved by it; others have very little but cling to it desperately.

Compare this rich man's sadness to the joy the disciples feel as they follow Jesus. See what they left behind. Two of them had left their fishing nets behind, two a fishing boat. Another left a lucrative career, pushing his chair away from the tax collector's desk to follow the stranger with burning eyes. They all walked away from something, but not because it was a prerequisite to becoming a disciple. It was more of a consequence. He called, they followed him, and things were left behind. Not because it was bad, but because it was in the way. Not because they needed it, but because they wanted to. He called and nothing else seemed so important.

Jesus hints at this when speaking in today's gospel of those who leave the commons behind and are often rewarded with "houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children and fields" – though not without persecution. Eternal life is a life of ever deeper communion.

Transferring wealth to one side, certainly influences our relationship with the dominant culture. For our society views, **wealth as sacred and a source of salvation**. Significant traditions of opposing attitudes challenge these beliefs, but **the greed movement remains powerful**, barely able to recognize other points of view.

However, for those who struggle to resist this, always wanting more money to get rich, even small victories, is stimulating; they are victories for which heaven applauds.

More deeply, putting wealth aside, declaring it relative rather than absolute, set us in a different relationship with God. Our salvation does not depend on us. We don't earn it by our efforts, nor receive it through a legacy, nor steal it when no one is looking.

When it comes to our lives and what they mean, then this can be the voice of the GRACE OF GOD for us.

Jesus said through this lesson, again, just like other lessons in His life on earth, that FAITH IS THE MOST PRECIOUS GIFT above all. (***Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*** – Matthew 6:33). Nothing must come between us and the kingdom of God. Jesus is not saying that we must always be in need as followers of Christ. And, He is not saying that money or material blessings are wrong, no. But that they are, instead, GIFTS FROM GOD to use wisely and share with those in need.

It is God's good and gracious will that we receive our daily bread – all we need for an abundant life: food and clothing, home and shelter, work, family and friends, good government. Heaven is described in the Bible as a feast and life with God, here and now, can also be characterized as blessings upon blessings with God's help, through faith and grace. In the name of Jesus. Amen.