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### in the Season after Pentecost

#### Jesus Speaks about Our Wealth

Some have more wealth and some have less. Some use wealth wisely and some do not. Some spend their wealth and some save it. Whatever our personal experience with wealth may be, we Christians are wise to listen to the advice and counsel of Jesus and his Word. In the Gospel for today Jesus encounters a man who had great wealth but allowed it to control his life with God. Jesus uses the man's sad example as a lesson for his disciples and for us all.

#### Sermon

Mark 10:17-27

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

Introduction: So the ninth grader gets his first job, mowing the neighbor lady's lawn. He does a good job and some of the other neighbors hire him to do their lawns. They all pay him in cash and he takes the money home and puts in a box in the top drawer of his desk. He takes cash from the box when he needs it and he's always a little surprised when it's gone. At 16 he gets a job at McDonald's and now he gets paid with a check. So he takes the check to the bank, cashes it, and puts the money in the box in his desk. And he's always a little surprised when the box is empty. So now he's off to college and he sets up a checking account with a debit card. He works at college and has a good summer job but he also spends more now and he's always a little surprised when the ATM machine tells him "No available balance." So he graduates, gets married, and gets his first credit card, but his salary isn't much and a baby comes along and he's always a little surprised when he can't pay the balance on his credit card. He took a course in personal finance in college, but never paid much attention in class, and now he's a little surprised—actually he is hugely surprised—that he's in debt up to his eyeballs.

That isn't exactly my story and it probably isn't exactly your story, but it's pretty typical. It takes time to learn how to handle money. We all had to learn how to balance a check book and control a credit card. We check our bank statements and our investment balances. We watch the stock market. We cut coupons, watch for sales, and some of us use our AARP card. We've learned from experience that we have to be wise when we think about our money.

I'm sure you've all figured out that the sermon today is going to be about money. In today's Gospel Mark tells us about a young man who came looking for Jesus and then walked away from Jesus because he had great wealth. So the main point of this Gospel isn't how we spend our money or how we save our money, but how we think about our money.

Jesus is urging us this morning to evaluate our ideas about money. We all have money, we all use money, and we all need money. So how do we think about money, how do we assess it? This what Jesus wants us to know:

### **Think about Wealth with Wisdom**

Consider wealth to be a liability

Consider wealth to be a blessing

**As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him.** This guy had a lot going for him. He was young and he was rich. He was a leader in the local synagogue; he must have made an impression because it was almost unheard of that a young man would be a member of the church council. He was very spiritual and very respectful. He was the kind of guy a girl would want to bring home to her mother.

But he had one big problem. He was convinced he could gain eternal life by doing good things and he had bought into the idea hook, line, and sinker. You can see this in the young man's question: **Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**

If Jesus had ever encountered a promising mission prospect, this man was it. Jesus started the conversation carefully. **Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.** Any good we offer to God must be absolutely good since God is absolutely good, perfectly good. From there Jesus took him to the Ten Commandments and specifically to the commands that list our duties toward our neighbor: **You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.** Jesus wanted the man to see that he had to evaluate his life not only on how he loved God but also on how he loved his neighbor. You might expect that would have broken the young man, but he was really hooked: Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy.

But he wasn't sure, was he. He wasn't sure if all the good he had done and all the commandments he obeyed were enough to gain him life with God. Tell me, Jesus: What's the golden key I have to turn, what's the surefire and foolproof thing I have to do to gain life with God?

Mark tells us that Jesus looked at him and loved him. And then Jesus held out the golden key: **Come, follow me.** This young man would find the surefire and foolproof way to life with God in Jesus. In Jesus there was compassion and forgiveness and certainty and hope. Leave all your obedience behind, Jesus meant to say and then he said, **Go sell everything you have and give it the poor.** Follow me, follow no one else and nothing else but me, and you will have treasure in heaven.

Right there the evangelism call ended with a thud. Jesus had touched a nerve: the young man was rich. He just couldn't reach for that golden key; he just couldn't grab what was surefire and foolproof. He couldn't follow Jesus, not Jesus only. **His face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth.** His wealth became his liability; it tripped him up and it trapped him and we don't know if he ever came back.

Jesus isn't asking us to sell everything we have and give it to the poor. The Bible mentions all kinds of believers who were wealthy. But Jesus is asking us for is our heart and our faith and our confidence. And this is where we need to think about our wealth wisely. We run the same risk as the young man in the Gospel: for all of its good, our wealth, whether it's a lot or a little, can become a liability. We need to ask ourselves: Does my effort to make money ever interfere with my eagerness to hear and study God's Word? Does my money ever seem to be the proof that God approves of what I do? Does my money ever give me the sense that my future is safe and secure? Do I ever find it's a lot easier for me to save than to share? Do I think about my wealth more often than I think about my Savior? Jesus said another time: **For**

**where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** Do we ever think about that? Do we ever consider our wealth to be a liability?

So the young man leaves and Jesus is alone with his disciples. Jesus is probably sad, too. And maybe more than a little frustrated. **How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!** The disciples jumped at that. They had grown up with the idea that rich people were closer to God than poor people--the rich people have all the stuff, right! Makes sense. So Jesus said it again: **Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.** Now the disciples are just all confused. If the rich can't be saved—and we've always assumed the rich were closest to God—If the rich can't be saved, **Who then can be saved?**

It's back to basics. Jesus knew all about the liabilities of wealth and he talked a lot about wealth. You remember the rich man who refused to help Lazarus and rich farmer who kept building more barns? Both of them ended up dead and in hell. St. Paul echoed Jesus when he wrote, **The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.** But money isn't the only barrier to life with God. If wealth can't get us close to God, poverty can't either. We can't get any closer to God with a good life than we can with a not-so-good life. What we have or don't have, what we do or don't do never counts with God. Who then can be saved? With man, Jesus said, **With man this is impossible.**

But Jesus said more. **With man this is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God.** What Jesus said to the disciples here is essentially the same thing he said to the rich young man. He said to the rich young man, Follow me and follow me only and you will gain eternal life. And he said to the disciples, God saves and only God saves, so trust in God and you will gain eternal life. Jesus didn't expand on those thoughts here, but he said plenty in other places. God saved us from the slavery of sin by sending his Son to destroy the devil's power. God saved us from the burden of guilt by sending his Son to the cross and accepting his sacrifice in our place. God saved us from the threat of death by raising his Son from the grave and assuring us that we will inherit life with God forever. And so we follow Jesus and only Jesus; we trust in God and only God.

Right here is the wisdom we need when we think about our wealth. This is wisdom that comes from faith in Jesus and confidence in God. With faith we believe that we have no greater treasure than Jesus. With faith we understand that Jesus means more to us than any treasures in our checkbooks or investments or scholarships. With faith we believe that God determines our future, not money. We are wise to plan, but planning won't save us from sickness or financial setbacks. With faith we know we have no wealth that does not come from God and that our money isn't any different from the color of our eyes or the size of our feet. God gives it all. With faith we find joy in sharing with others and in supporting the ministry of the Gospel. Faith leads us to be cheerful and generous givers. Faith in the one we follow and faith in the one who saves moves us to think about wealth with wisdom and to consider wealth a blessing from God.

We all had to learn about using our money and it probably took some of us longer to learn than others. In the same way we all have to learn how to think about wealth with the wisdom that comes from faith. Faith moves us to watch its liabilities and faith leads us to rejoice in its blessing. May God grant this to us for Jesus' sake. Amen.