

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 22B - Proper 24B
October 20, 2024
Mark 10:23-31

Wealth and the Kingdom of God

And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." 26 And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" 27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." " (Mark 10:23-27 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Are you rich? I suppose most of us would say, "No." I think we usually think those who are rich have lots more money, more everything than we do. Sometimes we may even wish we were rich like that. But there is a downside to such wealth. There's never enough. Those who have it spend their time wanting and trying to get more and/or worrying about losing what they have. They often lose sleep over it. That's what today's Old Testament (Eccl. 5:10-20) reading tells us. Being rich is not all that it's cracked up to be.

Last week we heard about a rich young man who came to Jesus and asked what he had to do to inherit eternal life. When Jesus questioned him about the commandments, he said he had kept them from his youth. By his initial question and his response to Jesus' question, it's clear that he thought that he had to, or even could, do something to earn eternal life. When he indicated that he had kept the commandments that Jesus mentioned, those of the second table of the Law, Jesus redirected him to the first table, and especially the First Commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me." He did that by telling the young man, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." (Mark 10:21). And we're told that "he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." (Mark 10:22).

Today's Gospel follows upon that encounter as Jesus further teaches His disciples. And as He does He tells them, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" At this the disciples were amazed. You see, the disciples, and many today, think that wealth is an indicator of God's favor. But it is not necessarily so.

And Jesus recognizes this temptation. It makes money such an intoxicating idol. That's why it's such an impediment to entering the kingdom of God. Why? Because riches can so easily lead a person away from trusting in God. Instead, they trust in their wealth. Their wealth becomes their god. That's what they look to for their greatest good. Money can so easily take our eyes off God. When you have everything you want, you may think, "Why do I need God?" Wealth becomes our idol, and that's why it can be so difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus re-emphasizes this point: "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." Picture a big old camel, the largest land animal Jesus' hearers would have seen—imagine a camel trying to go through the eye of a needle! Jesus is using a ridiculous comparison to make a serious point: A rich man who trusts in his wealth will not be able to come into God's kingdom.

With that, the disciples are "exceedingly astonished," it says. They were trained to think that the rich must be especially blessed by God. So if they, the rich, cannot make it in, who can? "Then who can be saved?"

And that's a good question. Because it's not just the rich who are guilty of idolatry, we all are, in one form or another. Even those of us who are not rich can be chasing after wealth, pursuing it, making it our chief desire. What is it that you run after, displacing God? When wealth or any other thing you set your heart on becomes your god, then you need to repent and leave that idol behind in order to enter the kingdom of God.

But how do we get in? Just because you left your wealth doesn't qualify you to enter. Who can be saved, who can enter? Jesus tells us, "With man it is impossible." No matter what you do, no matter what you give up, you cannot merit your way into God's kingdom. You simply can't do it. Giving up your "stuff" doesn't make up for, or atone for, your sins.

"With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." You can't do it! God's got to do it! God's got to get you in. And He does it through this same Jesus who is speaking to us today. It's impossible for you to do anything to atone for your sins. But it is possible—in fact, it is the case—that Jesus has done this for you. He, the Son of God, left behind the riches of heaven to come down into this world of idolatry and unbelief. Jesus took the way of suffering and death on the cross to rescue us from the domain of the devil and to bring us into the kingdom of God. Jesus brought the kingdom of God into our midst, the kingdom of blessing and salvation. Through His death and resurrection, through our baptism into Christ and the gift of the Spirit, we enter the kingdom of God. "All things are possible with God," even the salvation of sinners like you and me.

So the wealth we must leave behind is the wealth that we worship. After all, Jesus also tells us, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:14). St. Paul writes, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." (1 Tim. 6:10). Thus, the love of money, when it becomes a god for us must be left behind because it is a competing god. Mammon—money, possessions, and "stuff"—is a false god that cannot save. The only God who can save us is the one true God, the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit.

And this salvation gives us so much more than we can imagine. Peter remembers how Jesus had told the rich young ruler to leave his wealth behind and to come follow him. Well, these disciples had left their fishing boats and so forth. So Peter says, "See, we have left everything and followed you." To which Jesus replies, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life."

Jesus lists three types of things we receive in abundance when we enter His kingdom. First, in place of all the stuff and people we leave behind, we gain a hundredfold. "There is no one . . . who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands." Notice, Jesus says we receive it "now in this time."

This means that when you enter the kingdom you gain a whole new set of people and resources, in the form of the church. The church is God's family, here in this place and all around the world. When you come into the kingdom, you come into a family of caring people who help each other out. In that sense, you do gain a hundred times as many "houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands." Some of the family members who are here to help you, you can see around you in the pews. These are your brothers and sisters. At the same time, they are the ones who may need your help from time to time. This is why it is important for all of us to be here, in church, physically present, so we can know and share our needs and our loving help with one another.

The second thing you will receive in abundance, though, is something you may not want. And that is, "persecutions." Dear Christians, because you belong to Christ—note how Jesus says, "for my sake and for the gospel"—because you belong to Christ, you will receive persecutions. Being a Christian in this world is not easy. Jesus tells us that in advance. But know that it is Jesus who is telling you this, He who suffered and died to win you victory over your enemies—the devil and the world and death itself.

And finally, Jesus tells us we will receive “in the age to come eternal life.” This wealth is the greatest wealth there is. It is a super-abundance of life. Life in the highest quality, life in the greatest quantity. Everlasting life, perfected and restored, life extended into an unending eternity. Friends, there is an age to come that we do not see yet. There is an age coming when our Lord Jesus Christ will return and raise us from our graves and give us glorious, immortal bodies. This will be eternal life, lived in perfect harmony with God and all His saints. No more sin, no more sorrow. Streets paved with gold. Gates made of pearl. No more hunger or thirst, no more tears or heartache. “In the age to come eternal life.”

The wealth of this world doesn't last. Moth and rust destroy, thieves break in and steal. And it doesn't save you. Yet, in Christ, we receive so much more. In Him we have everything, a treasure that is ours even now even as we look forward to the life to come. Jesus is our priceless treasure now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener
Pastor

Immanuel Lutheran Church of Augsburg
1297 E 900 Ave.
Shobonier, IL 62885
church: (618) 846-8383
personal cell: 330-204-4180