

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost • October 21, 2018<sup>i</sup>

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

Rev. Braun Campbell

Mark 10:17-22; Ecclesiastes 5:10-20

“Consecrated: Money, Money, Money” (*Consecrated, Lord, to Thee*, Part 3)

People don't like to talk about money – but they sure seem to love singing about it. She Works Hard for the Money. Just Got Paid. It's All About the Benjamins. Money (That's What I Want). Money, Money, Money (It's a Rich Man's World). I Wanna Be Rich. If I Had \$1,000,000. Mo Money Mo Problems.

Talking about money is tacky, right? It's not like you discuss your spending habits with your friends and neighbors. You probably don't let other people know the balance in your bank account, or the amount that you contribute to charities. How about your family? Can you talk personal finances with them? How do conversations about money go with your spouse?

Why don't people usually talk about money and wealth? Why should we be so ill-at-ease when discussing a topic that is so ingrained in the everyday life of our society? We might say it's a private matter, none of anyone else's business. But why is that? Why should it bother anyone if others knew how much (or how little) wealth they have on hand, in their investment portfolio, or put away in real estate? I can think of a few reasons. People would probably judge you based on your wealth, or lack thereof. They might try to win your confidence and take advantage of you. They might decide that you weren't worth their time because you didn't have a big enough savings account, or that they're not worth your time if you do. They might see how you spend your wealth on selfish ends without doing something to help people in need. Money holds such an important place in our society and our lives that we can be afraid to talk about it. We guard it so closely because we depend on it.

This message isn't about money, though. This isn't meant to be an encouragement to give more to the poor or those in need following disaster and hardship – though that's not a bad thing. This isn't meant as an appeal to up your contributions to the congregation or keep up with your pledge – though those are fine, too. God's Word is calling us to something more important.

After last week's Gospel account of Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler, we hear what happens next. After hearing that young man and knowing what was in his heart, Jesus instructed the man to part with his great possessions. It left the man in grief, as it seems like that was one thing he could not do. When Jesus looks around at his disciples and proclaims, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”, of course they were amazed. Are not the wealthy people, the people who have money and possessions, are they not the ones blessed by God, the ones who have it all figured out? That was the thinking of their day – and maybe ours, too. But the truth of the matter is that there wasn't anything that this rich young ruler could have done to enter the kingdom of God.

No amount of money can get you into the kingdom of God; yet having too much wealth can make getting into the kingdom of God even more difficult. Why? Anyone have a coin in their pocket? In America, most all of them are imprinted with the phrase “In God We Trust.” But that's not really the case, is it? It's probably more accurate to say, “In Something Besides God We Trust.” That something might be money or wealth, but it could be strength or health or resourcefulness. **We misplace our confidence.** Like that rich young ruler, we seek to set up our own terms and conditions for what makes us worthy – even worthy for entering the kingdom of God. As Americans, we're especially prone to thinking too highly of ourselves, attempting to control life and health as if we were the ultimate power in life. But then the storms come and show us just how mistaken we've been.

In our reading from Ecclesiastes, we hear the Preacher's proclamation that wealth is passing, like the fleeting wind. Chasing wealth can lead to less satisfaction with life than living simply. And at the end of life, “he who dies with the most toys”... still dies. So use what you've been given. Enjoy it. Share it. Rejoice in your work and in the life that you have. Because everything that you have is a gift from God.

There's an illustration that I use in our Discipleship 101 course when we discuss the concept of stewardship. Imagine two circles, side by side. They're pie charts. In the first one, there's a little 10% wedge chipped out. When some people talk about tithing, they'd say you should give 10% of your income to the church – back to God, as it were. That 10% of the pie is God's. So as I'm looking at the other 90%, if gotten His cut, whose must it be? Mine! But that's a misunderstanding. The next pie chart just looks like an empty circle: it's 100% God's. That's what all of life is really like.

Over the past couple of weeks, we've been learning more about what it means for the everyday things of life to be "Consecrated, Lord, to Thee." As stewards, we don't own wealth – or anything else – we manage it for the One who has entrusted it to us. As Americans, we are, on average, wealthier than most of the rest of the world's population. With the cost of living being what it is out here in our region, it might not always seem like that. But no matter how much or how little money you have, God has entrusted it to you as His steward for use that honors Him. That includes daily things such as providing for your family's needs, paying housing expenses, covering medical costs, putting food on the table. But it also includes recreation, entertainment, and socializing. If 100% of "your" wealth is God's, and He wants you to use it as His steward, how will that shape the choices that you make? Each of us is called to follow Jesus in humble confidence, using what he's given. You might think that's impossible. And you'd be right.

This message isn't about money. It's about the one who does the impossible for you and for me. You don't get into the kingdom of God because of your wealth or how you use it. None of the terms and conditions that we might set up in life can make us worthy of the name "child of God." You don't need to place your confidence or sense of worth in the wealth that you have or in any of the things that the world might see when it looks at you: you are valued in God's sight. That's why He sent His Son to do the impossible and live the perfect life that no one could – not even the richest or most generous person – all for you. **While God owes us nothing, He gives us everything.**

Allow me to propose something different as you leave the service today – a practical exercise, if you will. For the next week, fast from spending. Avoid buying anything that you don't really need. If you've been following along here, you understand that this isn't going to make you any better in God's sight; that's not what this is about. Instead, take time this week to consider the "why" as you refrain from spending, thinking about what God has given you and how He's calling you to put it to use as His consecrated steward. I'd be glad to hear what you learn!

No matter how much or how little wealth you have, know that you can have confidence in Christ. As Jesus led his disciples to trust in him as his children, we who bear the name "Christian" can look to Jesus for our hope. When your life on earth comes to its end, it won't matter how much wealth you had. But one thing will last: the promise of undying life that you have in Christ. As you follow him through this life, then, know that he provides more than you could ever give up. He surrounds you with brothers and sisters, houses and lands to welcome you in through his Church, even when facing the persecution of the world. Together, we may use the gifts that God gives to care for others when the storms of life come.

It's true: Mo Money Mo Problems. But because of God's grace in Christ, you don't need to put your hope in wealth. As consecrated stewards through Jesus, we can instead say, "In God we trust."

**Amen.**

---

<sup>i</sup> This week's memory passage:

*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.* – Mark 10:25 (ESV)