

Sermon for the Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

'How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.'

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'This is a hard saying, who can accept it?'

For wealth is valued among us, as it has been valued by all people at all times, as a symbol of power and a source of pride; a sign of responsibility and prudence.

Yet wisdom tells us *'He who loves money will not be satisfied with it, nor he who loves wealth his income.'*

For 'riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches were lost in a bad venture.'

Since 'as he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and he shall take nothing from his toil that he may carry away with his hand. This is also most grievous evil.'

For it 'is vanity. All is vanity.'

So the Lord tells us *'why store up your wealth where moth and rust will destroy, and where thieves break in?'*

Surely, it is foolishness, to trust in possessions, for *'it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'*

Thus it is written: *'The love of money is the root of all evil. For having coveted such, many have erred from the faith.'*

Therefore, *'man cannot serve both God and Mammon.'*

It would seem that money and wealth is to be despised, according to the

Scriptures. It is an idol. A false god; for having money, we trust in the power it represents, and no longer depend upon the source of all existence, Almighty God.

Indeed, to trust in money, apart from trusting in violence, is the greatest and most ancient of all idolatries. For what cannot be gained by wealth? It affords to the common safety, security, a happy family, a happy life, a happy home, good food, good schools. It grants to the ambitious a name and a kingdom in this world, pride, and adulation; perhaps the patina of charity. It bequeaths to the corrupt power, to influence people, to bribe authorities, to battle institutions, to purchase *imperium*. What cannot be gained by wealth?

Therefore we consider those who are successful, who are rich, who are powerful to be *first*, and the poor, the broken, and the afflicted to be *last*.

In trusting in our wealth, our simple physical wellbeing, we forget to trust in the Lord, for we deceive ourselves into believing that we can provide for ourselves, therefore we need not a God to provide for us. Thinking ourselves independent, we sever ourselves from the source of our very being, upon whom we forever and absolutely depend.

It would seem that we are now guided by the sacred Scriptures to consider earthly wealth an evil to be denied; perhaps the way of the ancient monks and fathers of the desert, who lived on only bread and water, and dwelt in caves, is indeed the true Christian way of life; and all this business of suits and ties, of pools in the yard and granite countertops is to be condemned as not only *vanity*, but sacrilege.

And yet God made all things *in the beginning, and it was good*.

For no gift of God is to be denied, but to be accepted with grace and thanksgiving by the godly.

For the Lord promised our ancestors in faith that we live in His eternal will, that *we may live long in the land that the Lord has sworn unto our fathers, to them and to their seed, a land flowing with milk and honey*.

And Moses blessed us in this earthly life, for the Lord *'will love thee and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the*

flocks of thy sheep.'

Indeed the faith of Job is rewarded with wealth upon wealth.

Who then, is this God, who both promises riches as the reward of faith in days past, and warns of riches as a barrier to faith in the days to come?

The answer is simple: wealth is no barrier to faith when we realize that all our wealth, success, and safety is merely an *imagination in our heart*. For all things are *of God, and through God, and to God*. Nothing do we possess. We are all in poverty; and we enjoy all good things in life as beggars before a benevolent king who is eager to love, and to share His infinite prosperity with His subjects, and not only His subjects, but His people, and not only His people, but His children. For *the dog that eats the crumbs from the master's table* is also him whom God *has prepared a table before, a cup overflowing*. Sons of the Lord, and those who recline at *the wedding feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom*.

To be both the dog and the son: this is true Christian poverty, the rarest of virtues; yet this virtue the same Job professed, he who had all taken from him, when he uttered *'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord.'* The Lord ultimately returned to him his many possessions. He returned them to a dog made a son; or a son who knew himself to be nothing but a dog.

The Reformer's last words were *'We are beggars, this is true.'* For God alone is rich, possessing *the world and all that is in it; having all wisdom and understanding and knowledge and excellency*. We are but mortals, poor and suffering. Created on the sixth day, we are the *last* of all creation.

It is the Christ alone who is First, for *'the LORD possessed him at the beginning of His way, before His works of old.'*

Even as He Himself said, *'Before Abraham was, I am.'*

For *'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'*

Yet a rich man cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore Christ *emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, becoming nothing. And being found in the fashion of man, he humbled*

himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death on the cross.

This was necessary, *to fulfill all righteousness*, that Him who was before all creation might redeem us, fallen humanity, who, made on the last day, by sin, enslaved ourselves to every worldly trapping. That we may be lifted up, and rise with Him as His brothers, the firstborn of the new creation. This was necessary, this cross and humiliation, to declare *the kingdom of heaven is at hand, to fulfill all righteousness*:

'That the first will be last, and the last first.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Ecclesiastes 5:10-20; Hebrews 4:1-13; Mark 10:23-31.