

The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
October 10-11, 2015
Mark 10:17-31

“All of Life: Treasure in Heaven”

It's not even the middle of October yet, but they're already starting to hit our mailboxes: holiday gift catalogues! Oh, I know the real deluge is yet to come when there will be multiple catalogues coming each day. So imagine my surprise last week when I pulled out what I thought was one of these catalogues, but instead it was the Fall 2015 newsletter from Crossways International (www.crossways.org). Crossways was founded more than 35 years ago by Dr. Harry Wendt, a Lutheran pastor from Australia, to teach the “big picture” of God's Word, the Scriptures, from Old Testament through New Testament. Crossways includes “See Through the Scriptures,” “The Divine Drama,” and the 2-year intensive study of Scripture called “Crossways.” We've taught all of these here at St. John's, and hosted Dr. Wendt himself to lead seminars. Anyway, the newsletter carried the following article:

“Follow me.” When we read and hear about Jesus inviting people to follow Him, it all seems pleasant and even adventuresome at first. But after several moments in conversation with Jesus, a rich young ruler (see Matthew 19:16-22 and Luke 18:18-25) realized what it would mean to follow Him – it would cost everything that he possessed, even his own life.

Following implies that you are not in control of where you go, what you do, and how you live. Your former life, with all its earthly hopes, plans, and dreams, is over. When the young man finally understand the gravity of Jesus' call, feeling the opposing forces pulling at his heart at a most meaningful yet tragic moment in his life, he walked away from Jesus. He simply did not believe that the life Jesus offered him was worth far more than all his earthly wealth. Divided in heart, he walked away a miserable man.

We can walk away from Jesus, but we cannot drown out His call. It is the Savior of the world, the Son of God – Jesus the Messiah, who is calling us. Are we ready to keep following Him by faith – to let Him “ruin” our earthly lives – so that He can live His divine life through us? (“The CrossWord,” Fall 2015 newsletter of Crossways International; written by Rich Bosshardt).

Wow – God's timing is perfect because that is exactly what today's Gospel lesson is about. It is the story of the rich young man who foregoes treasure in heaven for treasure on earth. Our Fall Stewardship series, “All of Life,” continues today under the theme “Treasure in Heaven.” May the Lord's rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus' sake.

What's it like to live with regret? That can be a terrible burden, especially later in life when we are able to see our life more in perspective with the consequences of choices and decisions we made. It would seem that the rich young man walked away from Jesus with a load of regret, as evidenced by what we're told: **“Disheartened... he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions”** (Mark 10:22). And that's the danger right there: those very possessions that we think *we* own can come to own *us*. When you get down to it, what's the purpose of our possessions? It goes way beyond making a comfortable life for ourselves. Today's Old Testament lesson (Amos 5:6-7, 10-15) is a sharp rebuke for God's people then and now. Seeking comfort and ease while overlooking and even exploiting the poor and the needy is sinful, even evil. The call from the Lord to his people is this: **“Seek good, and not evil, that you may live...”** (Amos 5:14).

The rich young man seeks Jesus out for very sincere and compelling reasons. His kneeling posture before Jesus, his formal address to him (“Good Teacher”), and the depth of his question all indicate that this is

not fake, but for real. But his idea of goodness is defined by human achievement. Note all the “I” language he uses: “... **what must I do to inherit eternal life?**” (Mark 10:17), and “... **all these I have kept from my youth**” (Mark 10:20). His understanding of salvation is based on what he can do for God. And that religion is alive and well 2000 years later! Deep within our fallen human nature is the twisted belief that if I am good enough, if I perform enough good deeds, if I keep my nose clean, then God just has to accept me and let me into heaven. This rich young man is operating on an “if/then” basis: *if* I am good enough, *if* I do enough, *then* I will put myself in a right relationship with God. But how do you know when it’s enough? You never do, and so are left in this state of constant uncertainty about your standing before God. Jesus invites the rich young man – and us also – to a “because/therefore” relationship with God. Mark’s Gospel alone includes this brief phrase: “**And Jesus, looking at him, loved him...**” (Mark 10:21). That is beautiful! And this is the truth of who Jesus is for each one of us: “And Jesus, looking at him/her/you, loved him/her/you...” Do you believe this? Despite what you may feel, this is the truth of God’s Word for your life today: you are loved by Jesus, so much so that he gave his life for you upon the cross, dying to pay the price for your sin. This leads us to the “because/therefore” understanding: *because* Jesus loves me and gave himself for me, *therefore* I am set free from wondering and worrying if I have done enough or been good enough. *Because* Jesus gave his life for me, *therefore* I am set free to give my life over to him. *Because* Jesus loves me and gave his life for me, *therefore* I am set free to offer the obedience of love and follow him.

“The specific form of the sacrifice Jesus demanded of this [rich young] man is not to be regarded as a general prescription to be applied to all men... The command to sell his property and to distribute the proceeds to the poor was appropriate to this particular situation” (*The Gospel According to Mark*, by William L. Lane. Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1974; p. 367). So what is it in your life that Jesus is calling you to sacrifice in order that you may follow him? For each of us, it will be costly sacrifice, as we turn over to Jesus those things that, like possessions and wealth, can hold us back from the kingdom of God. This is what “All of Life” stewardship means.

“How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!... 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” (Mark 10:23-25). “The camel was the largest animal found on Palestinian soil. The violent contrast between the largest animal and the smallest opening expresses what, humanly speaking, is impossible or absurd” (Ibid, p. 369). But Jesus offers us hope as no one and nothing else can: **“All things are possible with God”** (Mark 10:27). “Salvation is completely beyond the sphere of human possibilities; every attempt to enter the Kingdom on the basis of achievement or merit is futile” (Ibid, p. 370). When, in response to God’s overwhelming love and forgiveness in Jesus, we place all of life into his hands, we are assured of a treasure in heaven where **“neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”** (Matthew 6:20-21).

This Fall Stewardship series is a call for each one of us to rededicate all that we are and have, “all of life” – ourselves, our time, and our possessions – to the Lord. Through faithful and wise management of ourselves, our time, and our possessions God is glorified and others come to see and know the Lord Jesus through us. In two weeks we will celebrate the Festival of the Reformation, and affirm that we are saved by God’s grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ alone, that is revealed in holy Scripture alone. This is the real treasure! As part of our Reformation worship that weekend, we will bring to the Lord’s altar our commitments for ministry in 2016 as a thank offering. Please take with you the stewardship mailing, read and consider this, and prayerfully determine what you will return to the Lord as your thank offering for the year ahead. May the Lord be glorified through our stewardship of his gifts for Jesus’ sake. Amen.