

Wealth, or Carey Street

The Homily

21st Sunday after Pentecost
14 October A.D. 2018

Grace Lutheran Church
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Mark 10:17-22

17. And as (Jesus) was setting out on His journey, a man ran up and knelt before Him and asked, "Good

Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

18. And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

- You know the commandments: 'Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honour your father and mother. "'

20. And he said to (Jesus), "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."

- And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "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."

22. Disheartened by the saying, (the man) went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Wealth or Carey Street

In the name of God the Father, God the + Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

As we continue our journey through Mark's Gospel, we find the story of a conversation our Lord had with a certain man. This same story may be found in Matthew Chapter 19, and Luke Chapter 18. These accounts are often entitled "The Rich Young Man". I am not sure why he is called young. Maybe he is considered young because he ran up to Jesus. He is also called rich in all three gospels. That is because he had great possessions. In any case, I felt that this would leave me out. I don't run very well anymore and I would not be considered rich.

The issue of wealth and riches is a critical issue in today's Gospel. "Rich" is a relative term. I took time to consider those who live in certain countries. Many people who live in Ethiopia live on less than \$1,000 a year. Many people of the West African country of Mali are very poor. The nation of Nepal,

situated

between India and China, has millions of very poor people. Closer to home, Haiti is the poorest country in the

Americas. On our way to our homes today, some of us will pass beggars on street corners. Compared to these people, I would certainly be considered "rich". On the other hand, by the standards of some of you, I

would most certainly be considered "poor". Every day I must delete about 20 E-mails from organisations asking me to "chip in" \$3.00 for their causes. That \$3.00 pays for one gallon of gasoline for my 22 year old

truck. At the same time, in my morning prayer of thanksgiving, I join Saint Paul who in 1st Timothy 6:8 says,

"Having food and clothing, let us be therewith content. It is my prayer that each of us will find that regardless of our income or net worth, the lesson of today's Gospel will apply to us all.

The source of this man's income is not made known to us. Most scholars tend to think that this man was some kind of Jewish religious authority or ruler. By the text, we know that he was well acquainted with

the Law of Moses. Last Sunday, we heard that the group of people who were questioning Jesus were

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Pharisees. Perhaps this man was one of them. In any event, this man was doing quite well financially, as a result of his occupation and/or his association.

The first words out of the man's mouth to Jesus were, "Good Teacher". Our Lord responded to these words. Jesus said, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone." This was no mere word of

modesty on the part of Jesus. Jesus is God the Son, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity. He is worthy

to be praised and adored by all creation. Keep that fact in view, as we press on to the rest of the man's words to Jesus. "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

For someone who had religious training, this was a stupid question. It is the wrong question. But let us follow up with Jesus' answer to the question, stupid or wrong, notwithstanding. Jesus said, "You know the

Commandments: 'Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not

defraud. Honour your father and mother.' (19)" Caught up in the popular cultural religion of the day, the man

answered. "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth. (20)"

This man had fallen victim to a terrible deception. This deception leads many people into spiritual bankruptcy. First, the man, thought that in order to inherit something, one must do something. Who ever

heard of such a thing! An inheritance is a gift. An inheritance is received upon the death of an individual. There is nothing anyone can do to gain an inheritance. There is nothing anyone can do to inherit eternal life.

Saint Paul stated this in Ephesians Chapter 2, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that

not
of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Second, having fallen victim to the first deception, the man fell headlong into the second trap of spiritual bankruptcy. He boasts of his apparent compliance with the Law. Here is the list of things that he checks off: He boasts that he never murdered, committed adultery, stole, bore false witness, defrauded, or dishonoured his parents. He has been the model of good behaviour. No citizen could possibly find fault with him. His position of prosperity was proof of divine favour. He assumed that his good life would enable him, and entitle him, to enter into eternal life. This is the delusion of demons.

Many are ensnared by this trap today. I call this popular cultural religion. Thousands upon thousands say, “I don’t go to church services and such, but I am a good person.” They will rattle off some good things they do that they feel would entitle them to God’s favour. Indeed, many of these people are, respected citizens, models of good behaviour in every apparent way. Often they live in prosperity and some degree of wealth. They sincerely believe that they are entitled to God’s favour. In this trap, they live their lives. These people are oblivious to the fact that nothing that they do will enable them or entitle them to inherit the inheritance of eternal life. Popular cultural Christianity is the delusion of demons.

The Commandments our Lord listed are all from the Second Table of the Law. All three Gospel accounts, Matthew Chapter 19, Luke Chapter 18, and today’s reading, Mark Chapter 10 list only the Commandments from the Second Table of the Law. This is very important and is central to our Lord’s response. Those Commandments all deal with our relations with one another. Our relations with our neighbour as Jesus said in Matthew 22:39 “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” So God has specifically commanded that we respect the authorities whom He has placed over us. He commands that we protect human life. He commands that we uphold marriage. He commands that we respect our neighbour’s

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property and business. He commands that we protect our neighbour’s good reputation.

The man in the text stated that he had lived a life of outward compliance with these Commandments. He maintained that he had lived a good life in terms of his relationship with others. Whether that was completely true or not is not revealed. Often, all too often, people gain wealth through improper or dishonest dealings. The abuse of power, position and possessions is done secretly, behind closed doors, in obscurity. Is it not striking that the Old Testament Prophet Amos said in today’s First Reading, “Therefore because you trample on the poor and you exact taxes of grain from him, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them, you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins – you who

afflicted the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate.” (Amos 5:11-12) This was written over seven hundred years before the Birth of Our Lord, but it reads like the daily newspaper. We speak of the “haves and the have nots”, and “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer”.

Rather than scold the man, or in some way shame or embarrass him over financial abuses or such, Jesus takes a much different approach. The text tells us that Jesus looked at the man, and that Jesus loved him. Too often, we condemn the rich and equate rich people with something sinister. Not Jesus. He loves us all, regardless of our economic circumstances. Jesus knows that sin, with its corrosive effect, damages all our lives in one way or another, irrespective of economic status. Jesus loved this man. It was His boundless, unlimited love that motivated Jesus to say what He did.

Jesus said, “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.” Jesus said, “You lack one thing.” Startling words to the ears of this rich man. After all, this man had lots of stuff. What could he possibly lack? He lacked repentance. He failed to comply with the First Table of the Law – the love of God. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord, thy God in vain. Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. The man believed that he was in full compliance with the Commandments-some of them, at least. This is what he lacked, fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Quite frankly, it is doubtful that he was in full compliance with the commandments which dealt with love for the neighbour. But aside from that, the man was absolutely not in compliance with the First Table of the Law – love of God. He was depending on his achievements and wealth, instead of trusting in God alone for eternal welfare. As we review these Commandments of God, we quickly discover that by breaking even one Commandment, we are guilty of breaking them all. In the Law of God, we find no comfort, no safety net, no relief. Since the Law only condemns, it behooves us to repent. No amount of good works, no outward so-called good life, no accumulation of wealth will be sufficient to earn, as it were, eternal life. All we can do is say, “God, be merciful to me, a poor, sinful being.”

The question of Christian entitlement? Are we, by virtue of something we have achieved, entitled to privilege, divine favour, and eternal life? Quite the contrary. The title of today’s Homily may have evoked your curiosity. Wealth or Carey Street. In the mid-nineteen century, Carey Street was the address in London where the British Bankruptcy Court was situated. Everyone in London knew that if you went bankrupt, you had to go to Carey Street where the judge would determine your fate. No one wanted to go there. In the Gospel, the Lord Jesus gave the rich man a choice. The man maintain his faith in his own wealth and

possessions. and find himself on Carey Street, as it were. On the Last Day, on the basis of the Ten Commandments, the Almighty Judge would declared the man bankrupt, condemned, and consigned to hell.

Jesus offered the man, and He offers us, a happier alternative. The Holy Ghost calls us to repentance. He gives us the free gift of grace through faith in Christ. He then invites us to throw off foolish trust in fortunes,

wealth and our own behaviour. Then God the Holy Ghost leads us away from Carey Street, to the foot of the

Cross at Calvary, where all sins are forgiven and eternal joys are found through Jesus the Saviour.

You are the Way; through You alone Can we the Father find;
In You, O Christ, has God revealed His heart and will and mind.

You are the Truth; Your Word alone True wisdom can impart;
You only can inform the mind And purify the heart.

You are the Life; the empty Tomb Proclaims Your conqu'ring arm,
And those who put their trust in You Not death nor hell shall harm.

You are the Way, the Truth, the Life; Grant us that way to know,
That truth to keep, that life to win Whose joys eternal flow. Amen.

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

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