

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

Mark 10:17-31
Amos 5:6-7, 10-15
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, I have here two rings. **Which one is more valuable/important** to you? This one came out of a **gum ball machine** and is pretty colorful. This one came from a **jewelry store** and has only one color, though it is shinier. Which is more valuable to you? Most people would say that this diamond ring is more valuable because it costs lots more money. I really don't know why diamond rings are so special. I like the colorful one.

Let's try this. Kids, which is more valuable to you, this **diamond ring or your parents**? That is an easy choice right? Your parents are more valuable to you because they love you, take care of you, protect you... You love them too. How much money are parents worth? They are sure worth more than diamond rings that just sit on our finger I think.

Let's try this. Which is more valuable to you, **your parents or God**? This is tougher, but I think that you would probably choose your parents since you know your parents better and because you live with them every day. But, God also loves you, takes care of you, protects you... And you love God too. The **better we know and the more that we trust God, the better our lives will be**. That doesn't mean that we'll get more stuff. It means that we will know how much God loves us and how much we love God. Knowing that will help everything else in our lives.

In order to love and have God as most important in your life, do you have to give up gumball rings, diamond rings or parents? No. As long as God is most important in your life, you can have and love your parents and have and enjoy all of the other stuff too. Every good thing in our lives comes to us as a gift from God, to be enjoyed, used, and shared to make the world a better place for everyone. However, if our gifts sometimes become too important to us, then we may forget about God altogether. That would not be good. But God is so good, loves us so much, that even if we forget God, he won't forget or give up on us. God is the most wonderful thing in our lives, even more than moms and dads. Thank you for loving us God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Are you rich? If you have money in your pocket or purse right now, you are richer than 92% of the people in the world. Jesus said, **“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”** Are you rich?

There is a story called **“Land Enough”** that goes something like this.

There once was a man who had a small farm of 30 acres where he grew vegetables for his wife to sell at their roadside stand. The man worked by day at a factory in town and managed to farm the land early in the morning and on weekends. At night, when they would sit alone at the kitchen table, his wife would say, **“Martin, we are most fortunate that our vegetables grow so well. People buy everything we grow.”**

But Martin was not satisfied and would say, **“I do not have enough land. If I had more land, I could quit my job in town and farm full time.”**

Soon an opportunity arose, and Martin borrowed money to purchase a field of equal size adjoining his property. Since he kept his job in town to help pay for the field, he now worked far into the night preparing the land, planting and caring for the plants that grew lavishly and beautifully. When he would return late at night, his wife would say, **“Martin, God has been good to us. The warm sun and the abundant rainfall have filled our stand, and still the people buy all we grow.”**

But Martin was not satisfied and would say, **“I do not have enough land. If I had another farm, we could sell vegetables to the stores in town as well as at our stand.”**

Soon an opportunity arose, and Martin was able to purchase 140 acres nearby. He no longer worked in town. Although his wife worked faithfully by his side, there did not seem to be enough hours in the day. Early each morning he drove his produce truck to three small grocery stores that were eager to purchase his vegetables. When they had time together to talk, his wife would say, **“Who could be more fortunate than we, Martin? Our fields are full and we sell everything we grow.”**

But Martin was not satisfied and would say, **“I do not have enough land. If I could buy more land, we could sell to the chain stores – that is where the real money is.”**

Soon an opportunity arose, and Martin purchased a farm of nearly 250 tillable acres. He closed the roadside stand, hired men to manage each

farm, and a woman to truck the produce during the harvest season. He built refrigerated storage buildings so he could sell when the prices were highest. Martin's wife did the bookwork while he supervised his many employees, including the seasonal help who migrated in to assist at harvest time. He now sold to many small stores within a 40-mile area as well as to a national chain.

On weekends, when they would go out for dinner, his wife would say, **"God is good to us, Martin. There is nothing we lack."**

But Martin was not satisfied and would say, **"I do not have enough land. If I could buy land south of here, we could grow other crops that our climate will not allow."**

Soon an opportunity arose to purchase a large farm 300 miles south. Now Martin commuted between farms and began to work long hours on weekends.

After a very long day, Martin suffered a heart attack and died. He was buried in a small cemetery plot, seven feet long, four feet wide and six feet deep. Just enough land. (From "Speaking in Stories", William R. White, Augsburg, 1982)

I think the poor fellow in our story missed out on life. What do you think? Are you rich? How much is enough? What is most important in your life?

In our Gospel text, a man ran up, knelt before Jesus, and asked him, **"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"** Jesus wondered if the man had been keeping the commandments about living in a good relationship with other people – don't murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness or defraud. And honor your father and mother. The man responded to Jesus, **"Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth."** Now catch this. "Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, **'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'** When the man heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving for he had many possessions." **Are you rich? How much is enough? What is most important in your life?**

"Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, **'How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.'**"

The rich man in our Gospel text had been living a very moral life – keeping the commandments about how we should relate with each other. He had

been busy building up great material wealth, lots of stuff. But, apparently, the rich man was still looking for more. Being good and having lots of money wasn't enough. He came to Jesus wondering how he could "**inherit**" eternal life. He was maybe always trying to do what he needed to do to make his life right. Do you think that we are talking about meeting the minimum or the maximum standards? Are we talking about a view of the world that sees scarcity or that sees abundance? Do you suppose that he realized that **everything he had was a gift from God**? Isn't an "**inheritance**" a gift? Are you **rich**? How much is **enough**? What is **most important** in your life? Are you going to **inherit eternal life**?

Did you catch the phrase? "**Jesus looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell..., give the money to the poor,... treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'**"

God didn't need the rich man's money. The rich man needed to let go of it. When Jesus paused to look directly into the man's heart, he saw that **God wasn't most important**. Jesus saw that the **man's money was** the most important thing that he had. Jesus saw that he was a **self-made man**. He was maybe religious, but Jesus saw that he **didn't have God at all!**

I used to tell my kids, when they complained about whatever was on the dinner table in front of them, "**We are so lucky that we were born here in the United States of America where pretty much everybody has enough to eat.**"

When we give money to help the poor in far distant lands, let it not be to salve our guilty consciences because we have so much and they have so little. When we give, let it be because we are **trusting that God is taking good care of us** and that God **invites us to help care for others less fortunate**. God doesn't need the rich man's money, but the poor, hungry and sick can sure use it. And that is how God works in this world. God's **very first people** - Adam and Eve, the **parents of God's special people** - Abraham and Sarah, the **parents of Jesus** - Mary and Joseph - all were blessed to be a blessing! Jesus came to live, serve, die, rise again and then he invited us to follow him. You and me - **blessed to be a blessing**.

If money/things/job/even other people are most important in our lives, then we are missing out on God's richest blessing. If God is most important in our lives, then we have the peace and security of knowing that it is God

who gives, preserves and enriches our lives. Then we know that all of the life-giving people around us come from the hand of God. Then we know that **we** can even take “**risks**” with what we have because God will preserve us and go on to bless others. We can **take risks to be life-giving people for others** to be blessed by. We worship a **life-giving God**.

Jesus’ disciples were just as blown away as the rich man when Jesus said that wealth was hard to slip into God’s kingdom. Everyone in Jesus’ day believed that if a person had a lot of stuff; it meant that God had blessed them. Jesus turns that all around. Having a lot of stuff doesn’t reflect God’s deepest, richest blessing. Passing along what we have is a far better reflection of God’s blessing. God’s blessing won’t just sit and rot in money chests or fine things. God’s blessing runs like a river of life, hope and healing into and through our lives and back out into a hurting and needy world. God’s blessing flows like 100 wells for thirsty villages.

When Jesus looked at and loved the rich man, and asked him to sell all of his stuff and give the money to the poor, it wasn’t so that he could earn his way into God’s kingdom. Jesus saw that the man was treasuring the wrong stuff, worshipping the wrong God. Jesus saw that the man had settled for the world’s temporary, little baubles and was missing the amazing wealth of God’s everlasting grace. The kingdom is a gift for anyone who needs it. The kingdom of God is given to anyone who lets go and lets God walk with them, carry them, and love them all the days of their lives and for all of eternity. Jesus didn’t tell him to sell all of his stuff in order to burden the rich man. Jesus was trying to take the burden off his shoulders. It’s pretty hard to pay your own way, to save yourself. Better to let Jesus do that.

If you’ve got a lot of stuff, maybe more than 92% of the other people in the world have, it might just be getting in the way of your life with God. But if God is the **foundation**, the **center**, the **source** of your days, then all of the other **stuff**, the **people** around you – **they all rise to their highest form of blessing** in your life and in the world outside your front door.

This whole sermon isn’t about hanging onto our money. It is about Jesus hanging onto us. I am very rich in the eyes of most people in the world. It all belongs to God. I’m just taking care of the stuff for now. I only have the blessing of the people around me for a little while. God will be here for me and for you forever. I know that we have to work to earn our living. But I also know that God is in my heart, my mind, my hands and my feet as I do

my work. God is there for you too. When the disciples were astounded that a good, moral, wealthy man wasn't assured of a place in the kingdom, Jesus answered, "**For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.**"

It's not about the money. Life is about "**Jesus loves me this I know.**" Is God carrying you? Yes, and that's very good, because "**for God all things are possible.**" God is where I'm going to place my hope. **Land enough?** Yes. **Hope enough?** For sure. Thanks be to God. Amen.