

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Mark 10:17-31
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 February 14, 2016

KIDS' MESSAGE

Kids, here is a picture that I drew of my house. Can I see the pictures you drew of your houses please? Thanks. I have some more pictures to show you. Here is:

-**First Lutheran Church** -**Rippleside Elementary School** -**Riverwood Hospital**
 -**Paulbeck's Store** -**The Mississippi River** -**The Aitkin County Jail**
 -**Heaven**

Now, kids, I would like you to stand by the picture that you think shows God's house, the place where God lives. Everybody in place? Okay, which one of my pictures shows where God lives? All of them. Okay kids, now I would like you to line up facing the people and show where you live. Which one of your houses does God live in? All of them.

We just heard the story of a rich, young man who came to Jesus to see how he could go to heaven when he died. He didn't realize that he and his house and all of his stuff already belonged to God. He thought you have to do enough good stuff to be able to live with God after you die. Jesus told him, "Well, if you think you can buy your way into heaven, go and sell your house and all your stuff and come and follow me." What happened? The man went away sad, because he wasn't willing to give up all his stuff to be with Jesus. Jesus already loved the man before he did anything. Jesus already loved the man before he gave away any of his stuff. Jesus just saw that the man loved his stuff more than he loved God.

Kids, we can't do enough good stuff to earn God's love. And we do plenty of bad stuff that hurts God, our neighbors and ourselves. But Jesus came to bring God's love, forgiveness and care to us anyway. God loves us anyway – in our houses, in our school, at the grocery store. . . God doesn't so much want us to sell our house. God wants us to know, love and trust God with our whole lives. God loves us first, wherever we are. Then we love God back. And even if we don't do a very good job of loving God, God keeps right on loving us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Jesus 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.”**

I made my home in my mother’s womb for five months before I tried to break out and find a new place to live. Bedrest for Mom and the care of her doctors kept me there until I was finally big enough to survive in this world. I was born weighing five and a half pounds. Once born, I began to grow up in a little house beside a north woods lake in Alborn, Minnesota. (Screen) Eier Lake became my best friend. That place was life-giving for me. I lived there until I went away to college, marriage and seminary. But I could still come home whenever I liked.

Jesus 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.”**

Mom and Dad got too old to take care of our little lake home anymore. They needed to sell it and move closer to shopping and doctors. None of us kids had enough money to buy it. We lost our home on Eier Lake. The loss of my home place about ripped my heart out. Jennifer and I were living in an apartment at seminary. We had nothing but car payments and rent. For the first twenty years of our marriage we lived in apartments or parsonages. The parsonages were nice, but they weren’t ours. After all those years, we had nothing to show for our work, except for years of schooling, jobs and a beautiful family.

Jesus 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.”**

My great auntie Hazel died and left her little house in Duluth to us. We sold it and after paying some debt, we had enough for a down payment on the house we now live in on White Sand Lake in Baxter. We finally had a home of our own. We bought the house for \$75,000, gradually fixed it up, raised our kids there, and for the past 23 years have been so gifted to once again live on water.

When I decided I had been pastor at Lord of Life Lutheran in Baxter long enough, we didn't want to part with our house. If we took a call in some distant place, we would have to sell our beloved home. So, I began to look for a call to a church close enough for me to commute to work. Pastor Erika told me that First Lutheran could use a new pastor to love and care for them. Thank you for calling me as your pastor. On March 1st, I will have been here for 4 years.

Jesus 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.**"

We put our White Sand house into a trust so that our kids will inherit it when we die. We want their kids to be blessed by White Sand Lake just like our kids were. Our mortgage payment and college debt may mean that both of us need to work after our retirement, as more and more people have to do now. We may have nothing left when we die. My mom and dad had hoped to pass along \$40,000 to their kids. Mom's nursing home care ate up all of that in the year after Dad died.

Jennifer and I have lived in nine different homes since we were married. And when we die, because of the love and grace of God, we will move to our eternal home with God and God's family. That will be our last move. Lord willing, until the day we die and leave this life, Jennifer and I will continue to enjoy the gift of a home on White Sand Lake. We will continue to enjoy the wonder of God's marvelous creation that surrounds us. We will enjoy and celebrate every moment of every day, food, water, air, clothing, family, friends, the society around us and everything we need for life in this world. And we will celebrate the inheritance that we have been given as children of God in Christ. Inheritance – undeserved. Inheritance – names written in God's will at our baptism. Inheritance – treasure, all of it, everything God has, given for us and for all people.

A rich, young man ran up to Jesus and asked him, "**Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**" The rich young man thought he could earn his way into heaven. He thought it was all about being good enough. Jesus asked him about

the commandments which spell out God's expectation for our relationship with other people. The young man assured Jesus that he had kept all of them. Apparently the man had been trying to love the neighbor. Then we hear Jesus speaking out of love for the young man. Jesus asked about the "loving God" part of the commandments. Jesus 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.**"

Jesus discerned that the man had all this stuff and saw heaven as an "**add on.**" When Jesus said, "**Forget your stuff and come follow me,**" the rich man went away grieving. Jesus realized that the rich man's stuff stood between him and God. Jesus wasn't looking for the young man's **stuff**. Jesus was looking for his **heart**. "**Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**" You don't earn **inheritances**, they are given to you.

Our kids haven't earned our home on white Sand Lake. We just love them and want them to have it. Our little house on the lake may be gone by the time we die. But our kids will still have the love that we have generously shared with them all of their lives. Our love is a far better gift to give them than our house. Jennifer and I have lived in nine different places since we were married. When we die, all of those places will have been left behind for someone else to benefit from. God gave us those places to find shelter in, to build deep, rich and beautiful lives in. Thanks be to God. The houses and the stuff will all be gone. But the love that God has so generously shared with us in each and all of those places, for all of our lives, will stay with us. God's faithful, undeserved, love and grace will carry us to our new home where we will be blessed to live in God's care forever.

Jesus' word to the rich, young man is **not so much about getting rid of all your stuff**. It is far more about **realizing that all of your stuff**, your house, your work, your family, your life, this world – these are all **gifts that God longs to share with you** every day that you are alive. And even better, **God's love for you and me** that Jesus so clearly reveals as he hangs dying on that cross, is **God's best gift of all**. **If you realize how much God loves you**, just the way that you are, you will be

set free to receive the **far deeper, richer life God** longs to share with you. It's **not the stuff**. It's **not being good enough**. It's **not measuring up**. **It is living each and all of your days confident and boldly in the loving arms of God** who created you and walks with you every day. This is the God who dwells in your house, your workplace, your fish house, your garden, the school, the hospital, the jail, the grocery store... There is nowhere that you can **go**, or **live**, or **work**. There is no **problem** that you can face, no **sickness** too powerful, no **broken heart** beyond repair. There is no **beautiful place**, no **joyous moment**, no **time of adoration**. Where God won't be with you, always seeking to **give you life, hope and joy**. You **can't buy** that. You **can't earn** that. You **don't deserve** that. **God's gift**. God's gift. Your **inheritance**. **Claim it**. **Live in it**. **Use it** every moment of every day.

It's not so much about the **house**. It's about the **home**. **Don't let your house stand between you and God**. Don't let your **job** stand between you and God. Don't let your **kids' activity schedule** stand between you and God. Don't let your **hobbies** stand between you and God. **Don't even let your family** stand between you and God. **God is there for you in all of these**. God has given all of these to you. And this loving God, who even died for you, says, "**Come, follow me**."

Does God want everyone to be a **disciple/follower of Jesus?** **Yes**. Does God want everyone to be a **pastor?** **No**, what a crazy world this would be. No work would get done. God can use disciples who **grow our food**, who **protect our lives**, who **bind up our wounds**, who **teach our children**, who keep our **roads cleared** in winter, who **deliver our mail**, who **haul our garbage**, who **care for our elderly**. Jesus wants us to **trust and to follow him in all of these places and vocations**.

I tried to bust my way into this world at five months. Someday I will be leaving. Don't try to live your life by yourself. God is right there with you. Trust God to give you everything that you need for a good life and to live forever with God. Start right now today trusting that God has a **good, firm hold on you**. Then again tomorrow, and the next day, and forever. God **delights in having you close and will not let you go**. **I am so thankful** that **God has been there for me** wherever I've lived. **God has been there for you too**. Thanks be to God. Amen.

