

TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR SEPTEMBER 18-19, 2022

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we certainly cannot take anything out. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be satisfied.

⁹ Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into complete destruction and utter ruin. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evils. By striving for money, some have wandered away from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains...

¹⁷ Instruct those who are rich in this present age not to be arrogant or to put their hope in the uncertainty of riches, but rather in God, who richly supplies us with all things for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they are storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

(1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19 EHV)

One of the first words we learn to say/truly understand is “mine.” From a 3-year-old’s perspective there are two kinds of things in the world: 1) Things that are mine; 2) Things that should be mine. Most of us have come a long way from the age of 3, but deep down that philosophy is still with us, the idea of “mine,” my stuff, what I’ve earned/deserved. We’re not too opposed to the prevailing cultural philosophy that says things like: greed is good; show me the money; if you can get it, grab it; Go for the gusto. Have it your way. You deserve a break today. Just do it. Just take it. Someone’s going to get it, might as well be you.

Now imagine you’re the pastor, and you get to stand in front of all these nice people who have this deeply ingrained selfishness and self-centeredness and sense of self-preservation, this sense of “mine” (please understand, I have all this inside of me, too) – and you get to stand before them and say, “Share. Not only that, love it. Love to share.”

It’s not too hard to do that, because this isn’t my message. These aren’t my words. These are God’s words. It’s his message. Christian stewardship begins and ends with Psalm 24:1 – **“The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it.”** There is a “mine” at work here – it’s God’s. I might think that what’s mine is mine and what’s yours is yours...uh-uh. God says, “No, it’s mine. I gave it to you and I can take it away. Everything/everyone belongs to me. It’s all mine.” That settles the question of ownership, of what’s mine/yours/God’s. This also should insure that ears are still listening to what God – not I – but what God has to say about earthly treasure, money, finances.

The way v. 17 starts out **“Instruct those who are rich in this present age...”** you might think this really doesn’t apply to you. If you had earbuds, you’d put them in, if you had a to-do list, you get working on it, or just settle for letting your eyes glaze over and tuning out the noise from the guy in front. **“Instruct those who are rich in this present age...”**??? You’re not rich, and neither am I. We don’t have many millionaires in our midst.

But if you made more than \$10,000 this year, you are richer than most of this world’s 7 billion people. According to Gallup, the median annual household income worldwide is \$9,733/yr. If you earn more than \$50,000 annually, you are in the top 1% of the world’s income earners. If that doesn’t get you, try describing to your children or grandchildren your childhood without air conditioning, air travel, wireless internet, cell phones, going out to eat. Try explaining to them that going out to eat, something we often view as a time saver as much as anything, was considered an outlandish luxury not even two generations ago. But while they are all gasping in disbelief over how hard you had it, you need to be asking yourself, “So why don’t I feel rich now?” Why do we worry? Why are we not content? Why, when it comes time to giving back to the God who’s given me everything – and I do mean everything for this life and the next – why do we hold back?

Why are we like this? Certainly this economy has something to do with our collective unease. Inflation, record home prices, market uncertainty all contribute to that feeling like you don't have enough even if you do.

God's Word doesn't give us a bunch of consumer confidence statistics and economic indicators, but it does tell what to do in situations such as ours. It says do ***"not...put (your) hope in the uncertainty of riches, but rather in God, who richly supplies us with all things."*** (v. 17). Hope in God is not misplaced, for our God loves us and promises to work out all things in our lives according to his good purposes. He sent his Son to step into our world to take on this whole issue of personal possessions and finances, and to free us from becoming enslaved by greed and from the truth expressed just a few verses earlier, that ***"Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into complete destruction and utter ruin. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evils. By striving for money, some have wandered away from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains."*** (v. 9,10)

Even more so, Jesus Christ stood as the mediator between us and our immortal, unapproachable God, taking on the full punishment for all the times we've followed the gods of materialism and put "me first" in our lives. He is the One God punished for our being so dissatisfied with the blessings he gives that we always think we need a little bit more to be happy, when in reality we already have more than enough! He was put on the cross to rescue us from God's anger over all of our sins, including personal finances that clearly declare that our hearts are not entirely with him and at least some of our hope is invested elsewhere.

Christ went willingly, and with stunning results – ***"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."*** (2 Cor 8:9) He was rich not in stocks and bonds and assets, hardly the measure of Who He is - but in the fact that he is God, – Creator and Owner of All - yet for our sakes made himself poor, taking our place under the law and on the cross and in the grave and beyond the grave that we might become rich with every spiritual blessing imaginable, esp. forgiveness and life with him.

So we are his children no matter what our checkbooks look like, no matter how ugly the credit card statement. His love for us does not fluctuate wildly like some volatile commodity or the variable APR on those credit cards. It is constant compassion and unending grace.

So through Paul God says, ***"Instruct those who are rich in this present age not to be arrogant or to put their hope in the uncertainty of riches, but rather in God, who richly supplies us with all things for our enjoyment. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share."*** (17,18).

We're back to "sharing." Are you willing to share? How can we not considering God's generous giving to us. We want to share. Next question - How much? Are you a generous sharer/giver? God speaks of proportionate giving, of giving back to him a percentage of all that he's given us. In the Old Testament, 10% was the rule. Today, that's a worthy goal, even to exceed that if you are able. But the key, again, is to examine God's giving toward us.

God is a percentage Giver. He gave and gives us 100%. He gave us his Son. We didn't have 2%, 5%, 10%, or even 50% of our sins forgiven. They're all gone, paid for by Christ's blood shed on the cross. Many are striving to pay off the mortgage on our homes, maybe dreaming of another home later in retirement. But you already have a home in heaven for all eternity. And it's all free, God's gift to you. And it's guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and by the powerful, enduring, never-changing Word of God.

So it is more than appropriate to occasionally ask oneself "how generous am I?" Against the backdrop of more than 100 years of blessing upon Trinity Lutheran and its gospel ministry, against the backdrop of ever-faithful, abundant blessing upon each one of us every day of our lives with the promise of more to come as our Good Shepherd leads us to green pastures day by day. How generous will I be with the resources God has given me? God asks his stewards to not only look at the size of the gift in the offering plate, but the size of the income it came from.

Right now is a good time to evaluate your current giving and plan for next year. Is your giving the same as it was five years ago? Ten? Twenty? How about the size of your income and resources that God's given you? How has God blessed you? As you evaluate, if you discover something working against the generosity that Christ in you is trying to generate in you, perhaps the most important thing you can do is to get rid of that obstacle/uncertainty.

If it's an overwhelming credit card debt, then go to the cross for the assurance of his love and a portion of his strength to do something about it. If generosity is being choked by an overly tight hand on your finances because in truth they are what make you feel secure for the future, then it's time to loosen the grip by putting more of your hope in God. If it's your feverish pursuit of recreation or pleasure, then let's determine to find our ultimate pleasure in that which we do for our God.

A life of generosity goes far beyond your offerings, far beyond what you write on this commitment card. Paul tells us ***"to be rich in good works...and willing to share."*** (v. 18) Offerings are just one way to measure our response to God's love. Time and talents, random acts of kindness and planned giving of our time are all part of a generous sharing spirit that is consistent with the calling we've received from God, a calling to live for Christ in every aspect of our lives every day. ***"In this way,"*** Paul says at the end of the reading, ***"[you] are storing up for (your) selves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that you may take hold of that which is truly life."*** (v. 19)

An elder was making a call on a wealthy businessman, asking him to help in the Lord's work. The man wrote a check for \$1,000 and handed it to him. Just then someone in his office brought in a message. The businessman read it with obvious dismay.

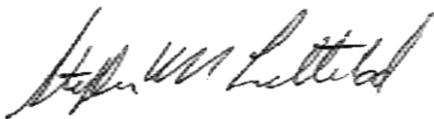
"This message tells me I have just suffered a great loss," he said, "It makes a difference in my affairs. I shall have to write you another check."

"I understand," said the elder, and handed back the check for \$1,000.

The businessman's checkbook was still open. He wrote another check and handed it to the elder, who read it with amazement. "But this check is for \$10,000," he gasped. "Haven't you made a mistake?"

"No," said the businessman. "That message was really from God. It read, "do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth."

Indeed, ***"Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we certainly cannot take anything out. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be satisfied."*** (vv. 6-8) Because in Christ Jesus, we have all we need.



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