

**St Peter's Anglican Church, Bundoora**

**12<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost**

**Sunday 11/08/2024**

**Sermon Series – Generosity, Stewardship and Giving (Week 2 of 3)**

**Reading 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 14, 31-33 / Ps 51:10-12 / Ephesians 4:25-5:2 /  
Mark 10:17-31**

(Readings are from New Revised Standard Version)

**Sermon Theme: *Grief, treasure in heaven***

By Rev'd Stephen Monsiegnur

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**2 Samuel 18:5-9, 14, 31-33**

<sup>5</sup> The king gave orders to Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, 'Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.' And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders concerning Absalom. <sup>6</sup> So the army went out into the field against Israel; and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. <sup>7</sup> The men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. <sup>8</sup> The battle spread over the face of all the country; and the forest claimed more victims that day than the sword. <sup>9</sup> Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on. <sup>14</sup> Joab said, 'I will not waste time like this with you.' He took three spears in his hand, and thrust them into the heart of Absalom, while he was still alive in the oak. <sup>31</sup> Then the Cushite came; and the Cushite said, 'Good tidings for my lord the king! For the Lord has vindicated you this day, delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you.' <sup>32</sup> The king said to the Cushite, 'Is it well with the young man Absalom?' The Cushite answered, 'May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man.' <sup>33</sup> The king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, he said, 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!'

**Ps 51:10-12**

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God:  
and renew a right spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me out from your presence:  
do not take your holy spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup> O give me the gladness of your help again:  
and support me with a willing spirit.

**Ephesians 4:25-5:2**

<sup>25</sup> So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. <sup>26</sup> Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and do not make room for the devil. <sup>28</sup> Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. <sup>29</sup> Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, <sup>32</sup> and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in

Christ has forgiven you. <sup>5</sup> <sup>1</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, <sup>2</sup> and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

### **Mark 10:17-31**

<sup>17</sup> As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>18</sup> Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. You shall not defraud. Honor your father and mother.’ ” <sup>20</sup> He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” <sup>21</sup> Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money<sup>[a]</sup> to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” <sup>22</sup> When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

<sup>23</sup> 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!” <sup>24</sup> And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is<sup>[b]</sup> to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> 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.” <sup>26</sup> They were greatly astounded and said to one another,<sup>[c]</sup> “Then who can be saved?” <sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

<sup>28</sup> Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the good news<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

**SERMON.**

“What does a rich man lack, that a poor man has in abundance?”

Nothing.<sup>1</sup>

Before going further I want us to clearly understand what we are referring too when we talk of being rich. We often think of wealth in a materialistic or monetary sense, but I believe this is too narrow a perspective. Wealth is something one party has that another party wants or could benefit from if they had access to it. An example is evident in a statement many of have heard at some point, ‘wealth is power and with power one builds wealth’. We need to understand that whatever we possess, be it money, material stuff, physical ability, knowledge and wisdom, and faith, are all things with value. These are things that we can be both poor and rich in.

Unlike Matthews Gospel last week, the context of “treasure in heaven” in Mark’s Gospel today is not Jesus preaching, but a rich man asking Jesus a question: “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus’ initial answer is relational, pointing the rich man to the commandments that serve to bring order to human life and society. When the man says that since his youth he has kept all of these commandments, Jesus interestingly doesn’t challenge his claim, but telling the young man; “Go, sell everything, and give it to the poor,” identifies the one thing that the rich man does, indeed, lack, the state of having nothing.

Jesus lifts the commandments to a whole other level. The rich man, like ourselves, is familiar with the ‘thou shalt not..’ aspect of the commandments, but here Jesus is stressing what we should be doing for each other especially those poorer or more needy than ourselves.

Jesus in telling us to be generous does not offer a limitation such as only what you think is fair, or what is comfortable. Jesus ultimately died for us, that was neither fair nor comfortable. How many of us give beyond what we believe we can afford. Generosity we as Christians are called to display is the kind of giving that sees us trust God, that sees us willing to give all that we have just as the rich man was told.

How many of us find ourselves identifying with that rich man?

What stands in our way of living the kind of the generosity Jesus calls us to live? -- ‘Grief’.

The rich man departs Jesus, “grieving, for he had many possessions.”

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<sup>1</sup> Anon

Now, we don't know what path the rich man takes after this exchange; does he go and sell what he has and follow Jesus, or does he stop following Jesus and go to his tend his possessions? The text does not say. I want to suggest that this is intentional, leaving us to wrestle with the possible outcomes that we may apply to our own context. However, at the core of that wrestling, is the problem of "grief," of emotional investment in things, in stuff, in wealth. This is not an easy struggle; I often find myself foolishly trying to balance generosity against security. But we must note, that here, as in the story of the "widows' mite" (Mark 12:41-44), generosity is set up not as a tithe or percentage, but as an all or nothing proposition. Treasure in heaven, comes from being utterly selfless.

It seems 'grief' over parting with, rather than possession of wealth, distracts us from both God, and neighbour. Given grief is a natural response to loss, the challenge is finding the strength to overcoming the selfishness this grief causes. Is it possible to see the act of giving not as one of loss but growth?

Today's versus from Psalm 51, where the psalmist prays for a "clean heart" can aid our reorientation. This clean heart is tied to a "right," "holy," and "willing" spirit. It would seem that a right spirit comes through the power of God's holy spirit and enables or sustains a "willing" spirit. The word willing is helpful. In Hebrew the word is *nüdîbâ*, which is related to the nobility — it is elsewhere translated as "nobles" or "princes" (see Psalm 146:3). This word is also the root concept of "generosity" in Hebrew. In other words, the willing spirit is a generous one, one that is inclined toward others out of its "wealth."

Willingness in our "clean hearts" and "right spirits" is the key to a free and generous stewardship — where we serve God, and our money and material possessions, our bodies and intellect is properly an agent of that service.

We are not all able to do everything, but we are blessed with unique gifts.

While some have physical limitations through ageing, they possess wisdom that shared with younger more able members of our community can enrich relationships, expand outreach and continue mission. Some are teachers, readers and servers, some are fixers and maintainers, some are listeners, some gardeners, some have greater monetary and materialistic capacity while others are rich in time as a commodity. Whatever our individual gifts, by trusting God, we as a community possess all we need working together, sharing what we each have to serve the wellbeing of all as Christ's body on earth. In this action we serve God's mission as called by Jesus.

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So as you venture ask yourselves,

Who among us can truly say I have nothing to give?

Where is your wealth and how is it made available for the service of God?

Amen