**21st Sunday after Pentecost – Year B – October 21, 2012 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Mark 10:17-27 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**“You are rich in Christ”**

*17As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. 19You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’” 20“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” 21Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” 22At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. 23Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” 24The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” 26The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?” 27Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”*

As Americans we are rich. We have the technology and the time to spend an average of 10 hours per day connected to some kind of media, whether that’s an iPhone, iPad, iPod, or TV. The average American net worth has historically amounted to more than 10 times higher than the average Indonesian, whose net assets total only $1,000. And we purchase more than 31 billion bottles of water per year, even though time after time tap water wins in taste tests and a year’s worth of tap water is cheaper than bottled water by hundreds even thousands of dollars.

Listen, it’s not wrong, bad, or sinful to be rich in this world. God made people like Abraham, Job, David, Solomon, and Lydia very wealthy. It’s okay to be a rich American! However, God tells us that what can be bad, wrong, and sinful is our attitude toward wealth. What place do riches have in our hearts? Where does wealth rank on our list of priorities? Today in our lesson from Mark 10 Jesus warns us about the dangers of wealth.

One day Jesus was walking on a road with his disciples. Out of the blue a man ran up to them and fell down on his knees in front of Jesus. Matthew and Luke, in their accounts, tell us that this young man was rich and that he was a ruler, most likely a ruler of a synagogue – a small building in the towns of Palestine where Jews would go to hear the Bible read and taught. This rich young ruler asked Jesus, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

First of all, Jesus addressed his salutation, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God.” Jesus didn’t deny that he was God or that he wasn’t good. Jesus wanted the young man to realize that perfect goodness comes from God alone – from him, who is true God – perfect goodness did not come from a sinful human being trying to do good in life….which is what the rich young man thought he could do - obtain everlasting life by living a good life. But God’s standard for earning eternal life was this: perfectly and completely obey his commandments. So, Jesus recited the last seven commandments – the obvious laws that most people think they’ve kept fairly well. The young man’s answer proved his confidence, “I’ve kept these… since I was a young lad.” But the young man felt that there had to be something more he had to do, otherwise he wouldn’t have approached Jesus in the first place.

“Jesus looked at the man and loved him,” Mark tells us. The Savior of the world showed genuine concern and love for this man’s soul. Sometimes love has to hurt and has to wound the heart first in order to apply the healing balm of the gospel. “Go sell your possessions, give to the poor, and follow me.” If he truly had kept those commandments, as he claimed, then he truly loved God with his whole heart and soul, and he would no problem immediately responding to God’s love with thankful giving and generosity to those in need. But his actions proved that he loved his wealth more than he loved his God and more than his neighbor. He proved that keeping the commandments was not a matter of external obedience – do not murder, do not steal - but a matter of the heart – be rich toward God and to your neighbor, in all things.

Jesus used this interaction as a teaching moment for his disciples. “It is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! It’s easier for a camel to walk through the eye of a sewing needle.” The disciples were shocked, Mark tells us. They immediately realized that entering heaven was not a problem just for rich people. Sure, rich people had their wealth to distract them from their true treasure, Jesus. But all people have treasures in their hearts that they love more than God. Jesus had just pointed out the idols they had set up in their hearts, they asked with horror, “Who then can be saved?”

There is a television show called Hoarders that documents extreme hoarding – the obsessive need to collect things, even if the items are worthless, hazardous or unsanitary. Hoarders live in homes that are stuffed with junk. The only way to navigate through the house is by walking through a small path between piles of garbage in each room. Even though these people have lots of stuff, hoarding costs them the most valuable things in their life: their marriage, their children, and their jobs. Most, if not all of us, would say, “At least that’s not my home! At least it’s not that bad!” Look in your own homes, your closets, sheds, garages, storage rooms, the attic – how much stuff do we have there? Isn’t there more stuff that we wish we had? We might even argue, “This would never happen with me! I would never let my money or my possessions get in the way of my relationship with my God like that rich young man!” Did you know that King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, pawned off God for the riches of the world? He even admitted, “Whoever has wealth never has enough.” Riches can be a problem even for Christians.

One problem is that we treasure too much what we already have. Just like hoarders who just can’t get rid of stuff, are there things you and I absolutely could not part with? If it were taken, lost, or destroyed, would we be devastated? Do we place the same value on the study of the Word of God?

Another problem is that we covet what we don’t have. Why is it that people rush to McDonald’s when the Monopoly game is announced - same with lottery sales when the jackpot rises to the $100million mark – there’s that chance that I could win something big that I don’t have! When we hear of someone else getting a job promotion, a raise, when we see others who have a higher standard of living, we ask, “Why not me? Why can’t I have those things?” Are we as “greedy” to be rich in God’s Word and in godly wisdom and understanding?

Another problem is that we don’t trust God when it comes to money and possessions. Are you worried about the economy, anxious about retirement? This is proof that we don’t trust God to provide. He promises to. But we call God a liar when we worry about even the most basic things: food, clothing, shelter.

We are wealthy Americans, and these words from Jesus are directed to us, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.” Even if we took the advice Jesus gave to the rich young ruler, sold all of our possessions, gave them to the poor, we would still be greedy, selfish, lust after things that we don’t have, because that’s the weakness of our sinful heart – it is never satisfied, it is always jealous of what others have, always focused on the earthly and never on the heavenly. Who then can be saved?

A millionaire with many heirs waiting for his wealth died. His children and grandchildren gathered at the hospital and after a quick and easy grief session asked each other, “How much did he leave us?” A family friend, on her way in the door, heard their great concern and said, “I’m pretty sure he left everything.”

Jesus died, rose again and left everything. This is what he left us… 1. his life – He would have never met the criteria for Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous. He wouldn’t make Forbes top 100 list of wealthiest people in America. But he was never greedy for things he didn’t and couldn’t have, but he was always perfectly content, always thankful. What is impossible with sinful human beings is possible with God, because Jesus is God. This is the inheritance Jesus left you – his life.

2. Jesus left us his death – for our sins of greed, coveting, discontent, each of us owed God a huge debt, a debt we could never pay with money. But by his death Jesus paid that debt. Although he was poor, there was richness in his death. His blood was the payment. He was a perfect, innocent man, free from sin. He had innocent, perfect blood, which made the complete payment for your sins - all of them - and for all of my sins. This is the inheritance Jesus left you – his death.

3. Jesus left us his resurrection – he was the first one to raise himself from the dead, proving he has complete power over death and grave.

Jesus leaves us much more than a relative who leaves you his million dollar estate – Jesus gives you everything you need – his life, his death, his resurrection. With his inheritance he answers the question, “Who then can be saved?” You and me!

First of all Jesus had to give us the gift of faith – it is through faith alone that we can receive these generous gifts from Jesus. But obtaining faith on our own is impossible – by nature, as sinful human beings, we are spiritually dead, unable to come to God or receive him as our Savior – faith had to be given to us – entirely apart from our works or efforts. God because of his grace – love we don’t deserve - decided to gift you faith with the simple sprinkling of water and the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Impossible! It’s just water! And such a small amount! But possible with God. Jesus attached his promise and command to that water. Through the power of his Word he gave you the gift of faith.

Faith receives the gifts Jesus left behind for you and me. Like a hand that receives the inheritance check from the deceased relative’s bank, faith receives Christ’s life, his death and his resurrection. Through faith Jesus has made you rich by giving you his perfect life. What that means is God looks at you as if you have obeyed all of his commandments perfectly – because he sees Jesus’ life in you. This means that you have met God’s criteria for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Through faith Jesus has made you rich through his resurrection. You have the guarantee that your dead body will rise again from its grave. Through faith Jesus has made you rich by giving you the inheritance of eternal life in heaven. Your rich uncle can’t do that!

Through faith Jesus gave you one more gift – a new attitude. Through holy baptism Jesus gives you a new life that is less rich in greed, less rich in worry, in selfishness, and is richer toward God, is rich in the study and growth in God’s Word, is rich in wisdom to handle wealth faithfully. This new attitude trusts God to provide. So if you’re wondering about the future of our economy, especially with the upcoming presidential election, if you’re wondering about your investments, retirement – know this: God’s riches never lose their value, because their worth is based on the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Are you wealthy? If you’re an American, you are. If you’re a Christian, you have more wealth than Bill Gates, Warren Buffet and the Walton family combined. Even if you lost everything - your home to foreclosure, your investments to a stock market plunge, your possessions to fire or tornado – there’s one thing that you will always possess through faith in Jesus – eternal life in heaven, bought with the perfect life of Christ and his precious blood. I pray that you may remain rich in the use of God’s Word and that your most treasured possession is your Savior Jesus. Amen.