

18th Sunday after Pentecost – Year C – September 26, 2010

Based on Genesis 14:8-24 written by Pastor Paul Horn

“A right relationship with your wealth follows a right relationship with Christ.”

How many of you had your own room when you were kids? How many of you had a sign on the door that say, “No girls,” or “No boys, stay out!” and when you came home from school you ran up to your room and called out, “I’m in my room!” It was your room and yet mom or dad could come in and mess with your stuff, and you realized that it wasn’t really your room. As an adult we are reminded that the property our home sits on is not my property. I can do what I want on my property but if I fail to pay my property tax.... see what happens. The city gives me this land to manage. Then why is it that the emergency broadcast system alert goes off every time we hear, “The earth is the LORD’s and everything in it.” My stuff is not mine, but God’s. He chooses to us with his stuff to manage it. How do we manage his things?

In such a way that demonstrates our thankfulness for the abilities to work and make money, in a way that shows glory to God who blesses the efforts of his people. Whether we have much or little, how are we managing God’s things? We might be poor stewards if we freak out every time the stock market takes a little tumble. We might be a poor manager if when we see the bills stacked up on the desk at home we start yelling at our loved ones in the home. If we are working senseless hours, borrowing more than we can afford to pay back, purchasing lottery tickets, and experiencing sleepless nights with financial concerns, we might be poor managers.

Part of our management of God’s stuff is our attitude toward possessions and wealth. Last year a news story reported that some hooligans in Los Angeles broke into a store. But they didn’t steal anything, no vandalism was committed. But they had a grand old time switching price tags. The next morning shoppers were delighted to see fur coats for \$5 and confused to see socks and t-shirts selling for hundreds of dollars. That’s what materialism does to us. It switches our price tags. Instead of basing our values on God’s truths, that we are priceless because he bought us from sin with his Son’s blood, we determine our worth based on what we don’t own. How often have you gone into Target, Lowe’s, or Walmart expecting to purchase one item and walk out with 10? Why? Because we always see something newer, shinier, and we have this “I gotta have it” desire.

What I have isn’t so great when I see what others have. I think my car is great until I see another one, the brand new one in my neighbor’s driveway. And I sit in my car and it doesn’t have that

new car smell. It smells like a family. How can we get what they have? When I get what they have? It's insanity! It never ends. We are gripped by the cancer of covetousness.

What about Abram in our lesson this morning? Scripture tells us he was a very wealthy man. To put his wealth into perspective, how many of us could afford to have a groundskeeper, butler, nanny, housekeeper, and a personal accountant? Abram had all that and then some! He had 318 trained men in his household who could handle a sword. And these weren't men whom he hired. They were all born into his household. He even financed his own military campaign. He took those men to rescue his nephew Lot who had been captured, along with the residents of Sodom. Abram and his men marched north for 120 miles, most likely on foot, attacked the four kings and their soldiers, pursued them another 40 miles further from original battle site and recaptured everything; the food, the men and their wives and children, in addition to loot from kings he just attacked and sent running.

As he nears home, Abram is met by the king of Sodom, who had fled during the initial battle. The king wants to reward Abram for delivering his people back to his city. More on that later... We want to focus on another character to this story, a man by the name of Melchizedek. The Bible doesn't tell us much about Melchizedek, nothing of his ancestry. He just appears on the pages of Scripture. His name means "king of righteousness." The Bible tells us that he was a king, the king of Salem, a word that means *peace* in Hebrew. Salem is also short for Jerusalem, the future capital city of God's people. Another thing that is worth mentioning is that he was Priest of God Most High. This is worth mentioning... After the flood, Noah's sons spread out to different parts of the world. Here, in the middle of a land full of pagans, where the majority of people had plunged themselves into heathendom, there seems to be one of those who clung to the promise passed down to him, the promise of the Savior, and he worshipped the true God. To this God he was a priest. He now showed his appreciation to Abram for what he had done by offering bread and wine to strengthen his weary soldiers.

Melchizedek transfers a blessing to Abram, from the founder of the universe, the owner of heaven and earth, and asks that he would prosper and bless his faithful servant. He also praises God Most High to whom the victory of Abram must be ascribed.

Then, Abram gives a tenth of everything to Melchizedek as the LORD's representative, a tenth of everything he recaptured and looted from the other four kings. No one demanded it from him. Moses won't be on the scene for another 500 years to tell God's people to give 10% to him. Why does he do this? Abram had a right relationship with his wealth, because he had a right relationship with his LORD.

Melchizedek reminds us that we have a right relationship with Christ. In the Psalms and Hebrews we are told that Melchizedek was a type of Christ. He was a picture of what Christ was to be. Both the priesthood of Aaron and the royalty of David, combined in one person. Both priest and king later gloriously united in Christ.

This king, the King of Righteousness and the Prince of Peace, brings peace to the world. How many kings today have accomplished peace? How many of our own presidents have attempted peace and succeeded? Christ Jesus brings peace for you. This king brings peace through his role as priest.

The same mountain upon which Melchizedek ruled, is the same mount where priests offered sacrifice upon sacrifice, is the same mount where the High Priest offered the one sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world. We hear nearly every Sunday, “he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” But do we stop to think about the significance of that familiar phrase? *To atone* means to make a payment to remove the guilt of sin so that mankind and God are reconciled, made at one with each other. For our sins of covetousness, for our “gotta have it” desires, for our lack of good stewardship with God’s possessions, our relationship with God ought to be ruined. God ought to be angry with us. But he loves us. And at the same time demands justice for those sins. Jesus comes as the atoning sacrifice. The High Priest comes with the Lamb, but he is the Lamb! And so Jesus provides the vicarious atonement; he sacrificed himself for the sins of all. He represented the whole world before God. As Priest and King, he brings peace between you and your God.

He entered you into that right relationship through the waters of holy baptism. The waters of your Baptism are described by Apostle Paul as indwelling of Christ himself. Baptized into his name, all he accomplished by his vicarious atonement is yours. You now possess a right relationship with God because your sins are forgiven, atoned for, completely.

Your right relationship with Christ moves you to have a right relationship with wealth he blesses us with.

Let’s go back to the part of the story when the King of Sodom approached Abram to reward him for what he had done. Abram had a right to the loot. To the victor belong the spoils, right? Instead, Abram confesses his faith in the one true God, and that in the presence of heathen

kings and rulers and soldiers, and refuses the reward, so that the king could not boast, "I made Abram rich." Abram wanted to be under no obligation to this king. He instead demonstrates his reliance upon God. God will provide for him. He didn't need this reward.

In Philippians 4 Paul writes, "My God will provide you with everything you need." Notice that he doesn't say "with everything you want, or provide for your greeds," but everything you need. From our Second Lesson this morning Paul says, "If we have food and clothing, we'll be content with that." This right attitude about wealth comes from a right relationship with our God. In our right relationship we understand that everything is the Lord's, and we are his managers. We will look to God to guide us in his Word how to manage the wealth he so graciously gives to us.

God tells us in his Word to give the firstfruits of my wealth and possessions back to him, the best of what he has given me. God wants me to give the best to him so that it can be used for furthering his kingdom. In the Gospel this morning Jesus said, "Use your wealth to buy friends for the kingdom." We know we cannot purchase anyone's soul for heaven, nor would it be ethical to bribe people to come to church or Bible Class with our money. What Jesus means is that we will use our wealth to support work of reaching out to the unchurched. And that is what you are already doing.

We took some of the best of your wealth from the offerings to host two outreach booths in E-town and Vine Grove, so that we can reach out to the community and invite them to hear about Jesus' sacrifice at this church. We use some of the best of your wealth to send our CMO (Congregational Mission Offering) to the synod's headquarters in Milwaukee. That money is used to support other mission churches like ours, to help spread the good news of Jesus. We are using our wealth for a new worship facility. The purpose of that new building is so that we can reach more people with the gospel. This is just one of the ways God guides us to use our wealth. Our right relationship with him leads to a right relationship with our wealth, and we are happy to use it according to his will for us.

I've often been asked, "Pastor, if someone won lottery, and gave it to the church, would you accept it?" First of all, it's not my decision to make. We have a policy for that kind of thing but, yes. It would be put into an endowment fund. As with any gift, large or small, whether a child leaves a quarter in their building fund envelope or someone leaves their estate to the church upon their death, we receive it with thanks, and believe that the individual gave out of love for their Savior, out of thanks for the right relationship he earned for them, understanding of right relationship with their wealth. I pray that you always have a right relationship you're your wealth because of your right relationship with your Savior. Amen.

