

# Sermon for Sunday, October 10, 2021 - "Help for Our Dis-ease"

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, Iowa  
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[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

A man comes to Jesus and says, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" When we hear that phrase "eternal life", we're conditioned to think about an afterlife, about a place called heaven complete with St. Peter and the pearly gates. We take this story to be an answer to the question, who's gonna get to pass through those pearly gates? It seems the rich guy fails the entrance exam.

So, what does that mean for us?

Do we have to give everything away, everything we own, to pass the test? Very few people in history have actually done that. Have they all failed heaven's entrance exam? Probably not. So, maybe this was just this guys' specific test, and it doesn't apply to us? Or maybe Jesus doesn't really mean sell everything, just make sure to be generous? Or maybe this story is just showing us that we really need Jesus to get into heaven? Except this story isn't really about getting past those pearly gates. It isn't about somewhere we'll go after we die. It is about this rich man's need for healing, our own need for healing, and Jesus' compassionate response.

Throughout the gospels when Jesus talks about eternal life, he's talking about experiencing abundant life in relationship with God now and forever. When Jesus talks about the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven, he's talking about life on earth being as God intends it. God intends for us to know peace, well-being and harmony with each other and God. When that happens, we experience the fullness of life that God longs for us to know, always.

In our story today, the rich man is not experiencing that well-being. He comes to Jesus and kneels before him. He takes the posture used by people asking Jesus for healing - they kneel and plead for the thing that they are missing. It seems this rich man has a sense of dis-ease with his life. Something is missing. He longs to know how he can be healed, how he can experience full life with God. Yet even as he asks Jesus for help, he seems to have a sense that he can somehow earn or achieve his way into healing and God's abundance. "Good teacher", he asks, "what must I do to inherit eternal life." Jesus looks at this man with compassion and sees his problem. It is his wealth. His riches are causing his dis-ease. His wealth is likely the reason he thinks there's something he can do to make things better.

The same can be said for us. We who live in the United States are among the wealthiest people to ever live upon this earth. We are all shaped by a culture that puts so much trust in wealth, profits, and money. And life in such a culture is full of disease and dis-ease as has become increasingly evident to us during the pandemic. There's such a massive gap between the haves and the have-nots; profits are prioritized over people and communities; we are doing so much harm to the planet.

We long for life to be different. We long to experience abundant life together with others, so we are now asking questions like the rich man asked of Jesus:

What must we do to promote peace, to live well upon this earth, to experience happiness and help children thrive here?

How can we be less isolated from one another?

What can we each do about inequity, about climate change?

How can we live more simply and still have enough to provide for children and loved ones?

What is a healthy relationship with money, one that doesn't involve having to spend so much time thinking about it and worrying about it?

How do we shape our lives differently in this consumer culture without feeling like it all depends upon us to figure it out?

What does it look like to trust God more with our money, with our lives?

Jesus sees the dis-ease and the questions in the rich man and in us and responds with such compassion. Jesus gives the rich man the answer that would bring him healing. Let go of what you have and give it to those in need. Let go of the illusion that you are master of your own destiny. Let go of living for yourself alone. Let go of trying to acquire abundant life on your own. Happiness, joy, and well-being will come as you give your money away and discover your connection to those who are poor, to all God's people.

There is great wisdom for each of us here as well. We don't know what Jesus would tell each of us individually if we were to kneel before him seeking help for our own dis-ease and our own issues with money. Would he tell us to sell everything we have and give everything away? Maybe. Jesus did call some people to leave everything, including possessions and family, to follow him. Yet he also relied on the hospitality and wealth of many people.

Some are called to give away everything. The rest of us are called, in scripture, to give away at least 10% of what we've first been given. This practice, called tithing, helps others. It also helps us so much. As we give, we find we can trust God to provide. As we give, we experience much more connection with other people. Whether or not we are called to give away all our possessions, we are called to let go of the illusion that we can do, earn, achieve, or buy our way to abundant life. We are all called to let go of living isolated from God and others. We are called to give freely.

This way of life may feel overwhelming, even impossible, but with God all things are possible. And, this call from God is not a test that we pass or fail. It is a compassionate response to the dis-ease that comes from wealth. God also gives us what we need to live differently with money so that we might more fully experience God's abundance.

God draws us into community in the body of Christ. Together we can have honest conversations about wealth, inequity and climate issues. God draws us into worship where we are fed and nourished and experience God's goodness. Here we get to delight in the true riches that God provides: people to love, words of challenge and hope, music that heals, the promises of God. Here we are assured of God's presence with us in all our questions and dis-ease. Here God pours out upon us mercy, forgiveness, and love.

God also showers us with beauty and delight each day through bird song, fall leaves, gentle rains, sunsets, loved ones.

We have all that we need.

We can trust, receive, let go, and give freely of what we have first been given.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.