

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

October 13, 2024



WEALTH

how much is too much?

by Drew Downs

When we read Jesus's condemnation of wealth, many of us respond with "well, he's not talking about me!" And then we might remember that the poorest Americans have greater wealth than many others throughout the world. What a pain to realize that!

I suspect that most of us ask the question with the assumption that Jesus will put us on the wrong side of the ledger—or else define the ledger as to accommodate us (because

we are good people and keep all of the commandments).

When we do this, we are certainly measuring our lives with the wrong ruler because we're focused on the wrong assumption. That it has to do with goodness—rather than what wealth *always* deprives. Generous living, sharing, equality of place, courage, hope, faith, love. This isn't about *you* or your safety. It is about our willingness to love and be loved.

ORDINARY TIME

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Politics and the Gospel

As we approach another election day for the United States, Indiana, county, township, and city, we are again invited to attend to the way our society is ordered, primarily through the election of specific persons to offices and in direct ballot initiatives. This is so often a season of great hope and anxiousness—and I have found both eagerness and trepidation from people hoping to turn to the church during this season. Some long for the church to be a place of safety, prayer, and commitment to the needs of people. And some long for it to be silent, emotionally absent from the tempest—not merely a refuge from the tempest, but a place truly unaffected by it. I find this latter expectation difficult to square with the nature of Jesus, who, while facing the tempest, allowed himself to be consumed by it to ultimately transform it.

Paul famously wrote that we are to claim “Jesus is Lord!” which is in direct contrast to the Roman directive to claim “Caesar is Lord!” It is a fundamentally political act. As is shunning wealth, giving to the poor, showing mercy to the penitent, and walking the way of peace. We are called to be politically active in our world.

What we often mean by political, however, is *partisan*, which is not the same thing. Engaging the politics of the gospel does not lead to nonpartisan outcomes, however. Because the politics of Jesus and the gospel demand we behave in ways that often invite comparisons to liberals and to conservatives. Therefore, we embody the gospel when we engage in the ordering of our world with great faith, hope, and profound love for the Kin-dom of God.

With love,
Drew

ORDINARY TIME

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 23B

October 13, 2024

Collect

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

Mark 10:17-31

As Jesus 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?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 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.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

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!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

ORDINARY TIME

Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” 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, 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. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

Reflection

The short response: This passage *is* about money.

A slightly longer response: This passage is about faithfulness, commitment, and the challenge of the gospel. And therefore it doesn’t condemn “rich people” so much as wealth and how we live.

A fuller response: Jesus responds to a young man who thinks he can ensure his own salvation by doing “the right things” without paying attention to how his wealth impacts others people or what it means to risk all his comfort and “success” in life for the possibility that Jesus offers the only actual assurance we can trust.

The irony of the moment is that Jesus’s disciples worry far more about the wealth and comfort of the pious young man than they do about their own place—which many of us do, too. Jesus doesn’t say living in the Kin-dom is *objectively* difficult, but that wealth blinds us to what wealth does, where it comes from, and how it changes the nature of the Kin-dom.

The disciples, who have already given all of their worldly possessions away, are living with a common purse, and followed Jesus a long way ask who could do this difficult teaching. They already are. It isn’t only possible, it is being done. By them. The ones worrying about how its done—even as they do it. Sound familiar?

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