



SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Sermon for Sunday, July 1, 2018

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

FR. ALAN GIBSON

Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15; 2:23-24 | Psalm 30 | 2 Corinthians 8:7-15 | Mark 5:21-43

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

If there's one thing the world understands, it is Wealth. Throughout human history Wealth has taken a variety of forms – gold, land, water, oil, tulip bulbs, bitcoin, does anyone remember the Bennie Baby craze? These are just a few ways Wealth has been measured. Every age and culture have come up with their own standards, and almost without exception, humankind has devoted most of its energy to acquiring and protecting that which the world views a valuable.

Of course, with everyone competing for the same prize someone will have to lose in order for someone else to win. In the pursuit of Wealth some will get rich, most will not, and few will be satisfied regardless of where they land on that spectrum. Even with the harmful consequences economic disparity has on society, the pursuit of Wealth has one unifying effect. Those for whom the acquisition of Wealth is an overriding concern share something in common, be they rich or poor: when it comes to Wealth, there is never enough. Everyone wants more. It's an addictive trap that wrecks countless lives and has held the human race in its grip from the beginning.

Even St. Paul, as he travelled the Mediterranean preaching and planting new churches couldn't stop talking about money. In nearly every one of his letters he begs for money, not that he was hoping to retire to a villa on Crete, but so that he could continue his ministry. Yet Paul was even more diligent in asking for the relief of Christians in Jerusalem, who were the poorest of the poor, as he was asking for himself. They had sacrificed the most for their faith. (To this day, every year on Good Friday, churches throughout the world, including our own, take up a special collection for the Church in Jerusalem.) Nearly all of Paul's letters contain a pitch for the Jerusalem fund drive -- to provide food and clothing and shelter for the oppressed church -- and two whole chapters in Second Corinthians are devoted to encouraging those who can to help those who are less fortunate. In the middle of a very straight forward talk on Christian charity comes a remarkable statement about wealth and poverty that turns this most prevalent of human obsessions upside down.

Paul says that for our sakes, Christ "became poor so that by his poverty we might become rich." Paul isn't talking about money hidden under the mattress, he's talking about a re-shaping of our priorities based on this divine example. The God who created everything, and who is by right the possessor of all that exists, set it all aside to become one of us. God became a human being and in the ultimate act of commitment entered into our lives for better and for worse.

From the moment Christ came into the world there was no way God could be called unsympathetic, remote, or out of touch with us. Christ shared everything, and despite our individual differences, there is one thing that all human beings have in common, and it's not a thirst for Wealth. What Christ shared with us is the all too human condition that there is nothing, not even our own lives, that we can truly call our own.

Everything belongs to God, and God gave it all up to show us that it's our lives that are of the utmost value. The God that changed Paul's life is the God that left everything in the hope that we would learn that the true nature of Wealth was not going to be found in what could be accumulated, but in what we could become through God. Jesus Christ did not just bring God to earth, Jesus bring us to God. In that relationship is where we will become rich beyond our wildest dreams.

Paul will be the first to admit that we still have needs that must be met in this world. People must eat, have homes to live in, clothes to wear, activity that engages us. Even the work of the Church carries a price tag. None of that has changed, nor is it likely to. What Paul wants for us is to turn our seemingly hard-wired thirst for Wealth into an equally obsessive thirst for God. In that pursuit there are no losers for everyone will be satisfied, just as God intended all along.