

In Nomine Iesu

The First Sunday after Trinity 2023

Pursuit of happiness and the missing commandments – Luke 12:13-21

“Someone in the crowd said to him [Jesus], ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’ But he said to him, ‘Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?’ And he said to them, ‘Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’ And he told them a parable, saying, ‘The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, “What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?” And he said, “I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Savior of all nations and all people. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

This is the time of year when schools mark graduations. Since most schools of our nation are secular in nature, they mark the occasion of graduation with motivational speeches to the students to go out and succeed in this world. Achieve your dreams. Fulfill your potential. Make a difference with your life. Change the world for the better, but better in whose estimation? Success measured by whose standard? The usual standard is money. The truth is that how you view money probably determines what “making the world better” actually means to you. If so, you will find yourself caught between the 7th Commandment, “You shall not steal,” and the 9th and 10th, “You shall not covet.” And you will understand the other commandments, the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 8th Commandments in the light of what you already believe about money, and how it will determine your success and happiness in this world.

But do you notice what is missing? Ryan, Abel, Peter, Amelia, Andrew, Autumn, you surely notice what is missing, because your education has not been merely secular. It has included the missing commandments, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd the world ignores. And it is the missing commandments that **will help you** and those people whose lives touch yours find success and happiness for time and eternity. Let us consider this truth.

I

Jesus’ parables often involve money. It is not hard to understand why. Dear friends, consider the money you have with you today in your purses and wallets. If you were to take out and look at coins or bills, what do they say? “In God we trust.” Why do you think that is so? I have been to many countries, exchanged American dollars for the local currency, and I have never seen anything similar on any other currency or coin. America is a rather young country. It did not come into being for ethnic reasons, as most other countries have. No, America was born of an idea, an idea of freedom and responsibility under God, which was to apply to our neighbor too: “all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among

which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” But to uphold that idea, our love and trust must be in God, which is the very meaning of the 1st Commandment.

So, in effect, the phrase, “In God we trust,” is a reminder and an encouragement not to misplace our love and trust, a reminder and encouragement that is often ignored. So, let’s consider the point of Jesus’ parable, which was directed to “A certain man in the crowd that was listening to Jesus, [who] spoke up and said, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’”

Dear graduates, you are going on to high school and perhaps college or trade school to gain the skills you need to get a job that earns money. And you will certainly need money to take care of yourselves and, in time, others. I am sure the man in today’s gospel needed money. So too did his brother. But, you see, the point is this. Jesus was speaking of the kingdom of God, how God rules the hearts of His people with mercy and forgiveness, something we need far more than money. Now, again, you will need money. Everyone does. But the world gives us many opportunities to learn all about money. Jesus wasn’t needed to give financial advice. That is not why people came to hear Him. So, why would this man have shouted out the concern he did, if he did not actually think his money concerns to be more important than what Jesus was saying?

Clearly, he thought his concern was a more important matter than what Jesus was saying. And in voicing that concern he shows us a great deal about the nature of the human condition, about your condition and mine. Rather than admonishing the man for his rudeness, Jesus instead takes the opportunity to address the whole crowd concerning money, wealth, and the terrible power it has to draw the soul away from God. Why does money have such power? Well, with His parable Jesus explains, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Jesus was drawing the attention of the people away from just “you shall not steal,” or “you shall not covet,” to “you shall have no other gods,” the most common of which is money. You see, money has this terrible power to draw us away from God because it gives us the illusion of security. And it is this illusion that Jesus unmasks when He said, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” In other words, money cannot save your soul. It cannot give you life. Only God has that power. Therefore, in God we trust, in God alone.

II

Whether you become rich or poor will not determine your success or happiness in this world. In fact, per capita, rich and talented people commit suicide at a far greater rate than poor people. Money has not made them happy. No, it is better, far better, to be rich toward God than simply rich. For then when death comes for you – as it will for us all – your earthly wealth will not mean anything to you, for you will lose it, all of it, and whose will it be? Well, simply put, it won’t be yours.

But when you are rich toward God, your death will give you wealth beyond measure, life without end, happiness without limit. So, one question then remains: What does it mean to be rich toward God? Here is where the missing commandments come into play. Let's use the older words of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd commandments: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain." "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." Have you always feared, loved, and trusted in God above all things? Hmm. Where is the comfort here? Have you ever taken the name of the LORD your God in vain? Ahhh. This is not helping me. Have you always set aside the Lord's day to hear His word? "Pastor, this line of questioning, this pursuit, is not leading me to happiness, but to despair. I heard you say, and let me quote you, 'And it is the missing commandments that will help you and those people whose lives touch yours find success and happiness for time and eternity.' To which I reply, 'Yes, that is exactly what I said. But please notice, I said that the missing commandments will help you find success and happiness, not that they will give you success and happiness.'"

No, you haven't loved and trusted God above all things. But someone has. You have not always used the name of God rightly. But someone has done so in your place. You have not always kept the day of rest holy, always seeking and hearing the word of God, week in and week out, always. But someone has done it for you. That one is the "Thou" of "Thou shalt." He is the perfect keeper of God's law, including all the other commandments as well. He has kept them in deed. He has kept them in word. He has kept them in thought, all His life. He did it all for you, for both He and His Father knew that you could not. Both He and His Father knew you would be drawn away from trust in God to trust in money, and the false security it promises, but can never deliver. So, He revealed His Father's will to you. He made you a promise. He told you plainly and clearly, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And then He showed you plainly and clearly, having taken on Himself the responsibility for all your failures to trust God, all your failures to keep His commandments, that He was drawing all the Father's wrath toward your sin away from you and onto Himself, and there at Calvary was paying the entire price of your disobedience.

He has cancelled your debt, all of it. He has left you with His righteousness in place of your poverty. He has, in other words, made you rich toward God. And that, of course, is why He told the crowd gathered around Him that day, including the man who wanted part of his brother's inheritance, the parable of the foolish rich man, warning each who heard Him. "So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." He has laid up the treasure for you, and made you rich toward God. That is why His Father sent Him into the world. It is why He willingly carried out His Father's will toward you, laying down His life for you.

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That "He" is Jesus. He is the "Thou," of "Thou shalt not," who kept His Father's will in all things for you. He is the One who pursued your happiness, and then laid down His life to guarantee it to you. He is the one you, Ryan, Abel, Peter, Amelia, Andrew, and Autumn, that the missing commandments helped you to see at Parkland Lutheran School in the preaching and teaching of Christ crucified for you. So, whenever in future you happen to pull out a coin or a bill, and see the words, "In God we trust," see in your heart Him who made you rich toward God. Amen

Soli Deo Gloria