

9.28.2025 Pentecost 16

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Amos 6:1a-7; Psalm 146; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

“Be rich in good works”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today’s gospel begins with a description of the lives of two Palestinian Jews and though the description is ancient, it describes the reality of wealth and poverty we see around us every day. In our wealth driven society, it is not hard to imagine someone enjoying the best clothing, foods, and wines every day.

In contrast the poor man, Lazarus, is also described with equal realism sitting at the gate of the rich man, longing for scraps from his table. Daily we see many modern-day Lazarus’s on street corners, at expressway exits and entrances to supermarkets, and in news reports about war-torn and impoverished places around the world. Yet Jesus’ parable is not simply social commentary, it is a realistic assessment of the human condition and our hardness of heart in the face of human misery.

Jesus’ parable is a very real warning about God’s reversal of fortunes for those who live only for wealth while ignoring the plight of the poor. In Matthew 25 Jesus gives a similar warning to the nations, saying, “*Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.*” In Matthew, those who ignored the hungry and thirsty, the stranger and the naked, the sick or in prison, are like the rich man of today’s gospel, sent to a place of eternal punishment. With these parables, Jesus reminds us that God’s ethical priorities are always with the poor and hungry, the stranger, the alien, and all in need. The ethical undercurrent of these parables is that as God has given much to us, much is expected of us in caring for those in need.

The reading from Amos describes the wealthy in ancient Israel, who though God had led them out of slavery in Egypt, lived without any sense of justice for the poor in their very midst. Amos writes, “*Alas for those who are at ease in Zion...Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock...who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, who drink wine from bowls...but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!*”

Amos is pointing to something that continues to trouble human society – a basic lack of compassion for the poor that leads to both personal and national ruin. Not being grieved “*over the ruin of Joseph,*” refers to ancient Israel’s gradual moral and spiritual decline culminating in the Assyrian conquest and exile of Israel’s Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. As Amos called Israel to use their wealth to care for the poor and the stranger, Jesus is also warning us that as God has cared for us, we are to care for others.

In contrast to Amos, Paul describes a living faith of good works and generosity that leads to a life of inner wealth seen in contentment, integrity, love, endurance, and gentleness. Like the rich man

who could not take his wealth with him when he died, Paul reminds us, “*for we brought nothing into the world because we can take nothing out of it.*” This is the realism of our human condition: even in death, the misuse of wealth leads to torment and separation from God. The gift of wealth dies with us, leading to separation from God because we have used it to separate ourselves from others. Notice that neither Jesus nor Paul condemns wealth, but rather, they warn us that a desire for wealth leads to a relentless desire for more, leading to the personal and spiritual ruin of individuals and nations.

I think it is fair to say all of us are comparatively rich compared to the modern-day Lazarus’s that we see near street corners, expressway exits, and grocery store parking lots. We may not be the super-rich, but we have enough to eat, somewhere to live, travel by car, eat at restaurants, and shop for food and clothing. What is at stake in Jesus, Amos, Paul’s words are that we have been created to know and rely not upon wealth but upon God for all things. In ignoring others, we are ignoring God’s care for us and setting our hopes upon wealth. The danger of wealth is it will eventually rob us of the greatest peace and freedom we can know, namely, an abiding trust in God for all things. These warnings are about a sense of spiritual ruin, leading people and nations away from the experience of eternal life with God both as a present and future reality.

In contrast, Paul’s words, “*fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called,*” remind us that faith is not simply a spiritualized ideal. Rather, faith is always active in love. Faith is God’s grace alive in us; it is the experience of eternal life now.

We are poised to begin our 2026 Stewardship Appeal titled, “*To whom much is given, much is expected*” (Luke 12:48). The rich man in the parable had been given much. Though he was no doubt a devout member of his synagogue, he used his wealth only for himself. His wealth had blinded him to a life of trust in God and a life of love for his neighbor. To the rich man, like those we see along the roads we travel, he was blind to the existence of Lazarus.

Our 2026 Stewardship Appeal calls us back to the very center of our faith; namely, that in giving to God and caring for our neighbor, we are also taking hold of eternal life. Daily, through the work of our church, we seek to bridge the economic and social chasms between ourselves and those in need. This church is neither a museum nor a social club; it is a center for God’s mission of love to the world – always radiating God’s love outward.

In giving toward the work of our church, to the upkeep of our building, and to our many ministries, we are “*storing up for ourselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, and taking hold of life that really is life.*” A faith active in love gives inner peace and inner freedom not only to us but to all who come into our church. God expects great things from us: a life lived in service to God and to our neighbor.

We live in the richest nation in the world and yet more than ever in my lifetime we seem intent upon ignoring those in need. We seem intent upon squandering the greatness God has given us to pursue only wealth rather than using our wealth as a source of light and hope to all people and nations in need. Jesus' gospel of love stands counter to our culture of success and wealth.

The gospel Jesus Christ is, of course, not new. Many have proclaimed it: Francis of Assisi renounced his own personal wealth and advocated for the poor; Catherine of Siena advocated for peace in a time of war; Martin Luther established "community chests" in churches to feed and care for the hungry and poor; John Wesley worked against poverty and homelessness; Jane Addams established Hull House in Chicago to provide social services, education, and healthcare to women, immigrants and the poor in an era before social welfare; Mother Teresa dedicated her life to the poorest of the poor in Calcutta; and countless pastors and theologians like Martin Luther King, Jr., Oscar Romero, and Gustavo Gutiérrez have challenged injustice and advocated for the poor as a moral imperative for all Christians. As a high school student, the Jesuit fathers drove this gospel into our heads and hearts with Jesus' words, "*To whom much is given, much is expected.*" Growing up in a parsonage to which the homeless, poor, and troubled came daily, I learned that caring for others is the work we do as disciples of Jesus.

St. Mark's is no different; we may not have a parsonage next to the church, but throughout the week people come to this church seeking help. I sit with them in the Reception Room seeing their tears and hearing their stories. Weekly, several AA groups use our Fellowship Hall for meetings that are life-giving and life changing. Weekly, we welcome the hungry and homeless into our church, serving them home-cooked meals. During the cold months, Room in the Inn offers safe shelter to the homeless.

This is the work you do as disciples of Jesus. This is what taking hold of eternal life and storing up treasure in heaven look likes. We are called to use what God has given to us in caring for others.

Living for others is life-giving. *Fighting the good fight of faith* means actively caring for others. When you financially give to St. Mark's, you are giving hope to others.

*To whom much is given, much is expected.* Be rich in good works. Amen.