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16th Sunday after Pentecost
Sermons
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LUKE 16:19-31 "MONEY & SELF- FALSE GODS"

"Money" by Pink Floyd

Money, get away
Get a good job with more pay
And your O.K.

Money, it's a gas
Grab that cash with both hands
And make a stash

New car, caviar, four star daydream
Think I'll buy me a football team

Money get back
I'm all right Jack
Keep your hands off my stack

Money, it's a hit
Don't give me that
Do goody good bullshit

I'm in the hi-fidelity
First class traveling set
And I think I need a Lear jet

"Desire" U2:

She's the dollars
She's my protection
Yeah she's a promise
In the year of election
Oh sister, I can't let you go
Like a preacher stealing hearts
At a traveling show
For love or money money money
Money money money money money
Money money money
And the fever, getting higher
Desire, desire, desire, desire
Desire, desire

The love of money and self are two false gods, which have plagued humanity through the ages, caused countless numbers to break God's will and commandments, and even kept many a person away from God's reign and rest in Christ. Money, money, money and more, more, more for me are the constant mantras of our culture in America today. In America we trust in the god of money. In America we serve the god of self.

Too many TV evangelists and preachers worship money and indulge their desires while their followers are misled and fall into poverty; they promise miraculous healings, personal prosperity, and great health to those who send in \$1-5K at a crack and follow their five easy steps. Too many business executives bend the rules, cut corners, and screw their employees and customers so that they have more money in their pockets. Too many Americans while chasing after riches sacrifice their family and friends just so more cash flows their way to be spent on what they want.

Money, so we are told, makes the world go round. Have a problem, just throw more money at it and problem solved. Money buys influence and access; money can get you what you want. Money can buy happiness and fulfill dreams. Money can give you the good life. I just have to have a little more. Show me the money! Show me the money! Money, money, money; more, more, more for me.

Money is not the problem. Money is a gift, a resource, a tool that can be used for many good and useful things or abused. But the love of money and the desire to please and indulge yourself is a big problem. Christians are not immune to the love of money and selfishness; our sinful flesh craves such false gods and the devil is eager to flaunt them before us. Full aware of our weakness St. Paul teaches and warns in 1 Timothy 6:6-10: **6** *Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, 7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. 8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*

The love of money and self are responsible for the current economic downturn; people wanted homes and things they really could not afford and those with money were willing to give out mortgages to those people, so that they could gain more money. The lust for more and more for me did not result in more for greedy lenders or more homes and things for greedy buyers, but less and less for all Americans. But all the problems and evils that have come upon Americans in our present economic crisis are nothing compared to the spiritual consequences. Christians, those who believe and trust in Christ can, have, and do fall away from faith in Christ for the love of money and self; money and self become false gods and drive faith in Christ away!

Our Lord Jesus, Himself warned His disciples and hearers against the love of money and self saying, **13** *"No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You*

*cannot serve God and money” (Luke 16:13). But as usual, Jesus’ teaching sparked controversy and opposition from the well off Pharisees. Luke 16:14-15 records, **14 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed Him. 15 And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.***

Following this exchange Jesus went on to tell the story the rich man and Lazarus to the Pharisees and His disciples as a further warning against the love of money and self; for Jesus desired and desires all to repent from sin and false gods of every kind.

19 Now there was a rich man, and he used to wear purple and fine linen while making merry each day splendidly. 20 But some poor man named Lazarus had been cast toward his gate, being covered with sores 21 and he kept on desiring to be filled from the things which fell from the table of the rich man; but instead the dogs came and were licking his sores. 22 And it happened that the rich man died and he was carried away by the angels into the bosom of Abraham; but also the rich man died and was buried. 23 And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and he saw Abraham from a distance and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he called and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus in order that he might dip the tip of his finger with water and cool my tongue, because I am in pain in this flame.’ 25 And Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you received your good things in your life, and Lazarus likewise bad things; but now here he is comforted, but you are in pain. 26 and in all these between us and you a great chasm has been established, in order that those wishing to cross over from here toward you are not able, nor from there can they pass through toward us.’ 27 And he said, ‘I ask you father, that you might send him into the house of my father, 28 for I have five brothers, in order that he might bear witness to them, lest also they might come into this place of torment.’ 29 But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ 30 But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, rather if someone from the dead might go to them then they shall repent.’ 31 But he said to him, ‘If Moses and the Prophets they do not hear, then neither shall they be persuaded by someone risen from the dead.’

Now we should not read too much into this story of Jesus in regards to the exact nature and experience of those who die. For instance, we should not be too quick to assume that those suffering in Hades can in fact communicate in any way with those who are with God in Abraham’s bosom or that either can see each other; this may or may not be the case. Jesus is here telling a story, similar to a parable, in order to humble and warn people whose gods are money and self to repent, lest they suffer eternally; Jesus’ intention is not to give a full picture of the after life. Jesus and Scripture give very little clear details on what happens to people right when they die, but instead focus on the resurrection of the body for believers and eternal judgment for unbelievers on the Last Day at Christ’s return. This much is clear, Hades, the place apart from God is a place of suffering, while Abraham’s bosom, the place with God is a place of comfort.

Jesus’ story flies in the face of the ancient and contemporary view that wealth, prosperity, and good health are signs of God’s favor and approval of a person. Lazarus, the poor man cast at the gate with sores in life, is the person favored and comforted by God in the end; while the rich man who indulges himself daily in his own merry making bought with his great wealth is rejected by God and suffers torment in the end. The contrast between the rich man and Lazarus in this story could not be greater.

In life the rich man had everything he could desire; he wore the clothing of kings, purple and fine linen, and he lived the Kiss lifestyle, “rock n roll all night and party

everyday.” The rich man ignored the needs of his neighbors, of the poor man Lazarus; he had ample wealth to care for Lazarus’ needs, to feed and clothe him and provide medical help, but he was too busy worshiping himself and loving his money to help. The rich man lived for himself; he died; and in Hades was in torment, suffering pain from flames. Notice in the story the rich man has no name, but is only known by his excessive wealth and self love.

In life Lazarus was poor and sick. He sat as a beggar at the rich man’s gate hoping for even some scraps, some leftovers from the rich man. But, Lazarus didn’t even get scraps, instead the dogs harassed him. But in death, Lazarus was carried away by the angels of God to Abraham’s bosom, to the people of God, and comforted. In contrast to the rich man, Lazarus is named by Jesus; he is the one remembered by God and gathered to live with Abraham and all who are children of Abraham.

Jesus’ call to repentance to those who love money and themselves could not be more clear in this story. Jesus lays it out clearly for all; if money is your god, if self indulgence is your god, like the rich man, then you shall suffer eternally in flames apart from God and there shall be no rest. But if you hear the witness of the Scriptures, the witness of Moses and the Prophets, that testify to Christ Jesus, then even though you may be a poor, miserable, beggar, and sinner, you too shall be gathered to Abraham’s bosom and be comforted.

What say you? Is the witness of Holy Scripture good enough for you? Do you hear Scriptures’ call for you, a sinner, to repent of your love of money and self and to trust in the mercy and grace of God come in Christ Jesus? Or are you waiting for more signs, wonders, and proofs from God, before you give up the pursuit of wealth, the accumulation of things, and the fulfilling of your own desires, while your poor neighbor is in need and you ignore him? How much money, how many things, do you need to be content in life?

God has given one sign, which the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments bear witness to, the sign of divine necessity that Jesus told to His disciples, the sign of the cross and resurrection from the dead. Jesus said, *“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised”* (Luke 9:22). Jesus came to seek and save sinners. Jesus came to call sinners to repent from false gods, from the false gods of money and self. Jesus gave His life, so that poor and miserable as we are now because of sin, we might be comforted in the resurrection.

So who is your God? Who do you serve? Who are you following into death? Money and self or Christ Jesus? Christ Jesus the Lord calls you to repent of your love for money and yourself and to die with Him in your Baptism. Christ calls you rise with Him in Baptism as one forgiven and freed from sin and false gods. Christ Jesus calls you to follow Him and remember the needs of your neighbor; He calls you to serve them in love as He has gifted you.

Where are your neighbors? They are here in this congregation, your brothers and sisters in Christ. They are your families and friends. They are the people in your neighborhood, the people you work with, and the people you go to school with. God has placed you where you are and given you the relationships you have and given you all your abilities and resources, not so you can serve yourself, but to serve your neighbor, so do it. Do it when it is easy and do when it is hard. And be comforted that God in Christ Jesus has served and continues to serve you, giving you forgiveness and the promise of the resurrection where you shall be whole and comforted for all eternity.

Hear the witness of the Scriptures; hear the call of Christ Jesus the Lord! The Word of the Lord is Life! But to ignore His Word is eternal suffering and death. Do not love and serve money and self; trust the Word of Christ and serve your neighbor, Amen!