

**Applewood United Church
An Affirming Community
Sunday August 3, 2025
Worship with Westminster UC
Eighth Sunday After Pentecost
(*please stand in body or in spirit)
Bold words are for all to share**

Music for Gathering

Territorial Acknowledgment and Announcements

We understand that the land on which we live, work and worship is situated upon traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron - Wyandot, the Haudenosaunee and later the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. The territory is mutually covered by the "Dish with One Spoon" Wampum Belt agreement. In the spirit of reconciliation, we commit to building relationships with all created beings, those who were here before, those who have settled, and those who continue to settle on this land. We commit to partnering with our Indigenous neighbours in being stewards and caretakers of God's Creation. Today, this remains the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we seek to live as reconciled people through our respect for, and our learning and understanding of, our Indigenous siblings.

Centering Music: "Holy, Holy, Holy" VU 951 (x2)

* Call to Worship and Opening Prayer: (*responsive*)

One: In a world that is sometimes scary and confusing,

All: we come to find sanctuary.

One: In a world that is sometimes ahead of itself,

All: we come to encounter what is holy.

One: In a society that abuses power so readily,

**All: we come to weave ourselves into the circle
of God's all-encompassing love. Amen.**

Opening Hymn: "Draw the Circle Wide" MV 145

Prayer for Reflection and Revelation:

All: Faithful Friend, Great Deliverer, you who search and know us and are acquainted with all our ways: We gather with our sisters and brothers in Christ that you might refresh our souls with worship and praise; that you might renew our faith with your Word and encourage

our faithful living with Christ's example. We need you. Help us to know that you are with us and that we are with you, always. Amen

Musical response: "Jesus Calls Us" VU 562 (verse 1)

Scripture Readings:

Psalm 107:1–9, 43 (VU p. 831 Part One)

Luke 12:13–21 (NRSV)

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

All: Thanks be to God.

Musical Reflection: "Meditation 9: Hymn"

Reflection: "The Question of Money"

Hymn of Dedication: "My Soul Cries Out (Canticle of the Turning)" MV 120

Invitation to the Offering

Offering of Music: "His Eye is on the Sparrow"

Hymn of Dedication: "For the Gift of Creation" VU 538

Offering Prayer

All: God, you care for us with a steadfast love. Your goodness fills and satisfies us. You are rich and blessing, and we give you thanks. Help us to learn to be rich toward you, claiming the true wealth that comes from loving and serving you. Amen

Prayers of the People

God of grace, we come to you

believing you are present with us.

We give thanks for the gifts of faith and trust
that enable us to meet each day as it comes.

Be with all who face major decisions in their lives—decisions about occupation, relationships or
priorities. Guide them by your Spirit.

May they know you are with them,
whatever choices they make.

We pray for all who are ill, for those at home,

in hospital, and in other care institutions.

May the suffering know your healing presence. May they be strengthened in body, mind, and spirit.

Be with all who care for the sick. Equip them with your compassion and patience.

We pray for all who are grieving.

Comfort the sorrowing with your hope and love.

Enable us to be a support to those who mourn.

We pray for everyone who is bent down by life and the situations they face. May the Risen Christ release crippled lives from bondage, so that we do not despair but proclaim your goodness.

We pray for this congregation and all of its households.

Help us to live out our faith to bring honour to you and life, energy, and hope to all.

May we remain faithful to our calling, as your son, Jesus, was faithful.

All this, and the prayers of our hearts, we offer in Christ's name.

Seasons of the Spirit - Gayle Glover, 1995

The Lord's Prayer VU 916 A Paraphrase

**All: Eternal Spirit,
 Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
 Source of all that is and that shall be.
 Father and Mother of us all,
 Loving God, in whom is heaven:**

**The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!**

**With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.**

**For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and forever. Amen.**

***Closing Hymn: "In Christ There is No East or West" VU 606**

*** Commissioning/Benediction**

One: In this time, we have lived in the truth that God's compassion is warm and tender, God's love for us is strong, and we are rich in God's steadfast love.

All: We go sustained by a spirit of love to invest our hearts, minds, and souls in God's ways. Amen

*Sung Amen VU 967

Music for Scattering

Reflection: "The Question of Money"

Let us pray:

Generous God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, now and always, Amen.

I want to set your minds at ease before I begin: this is not a stewardship sermon. In the United Church, we like to give congregations lots of notice about stewardship campaigns so individual members can avoid attending on those Sundays.

When reading the Gospels, it is clear that Jesus had issues with the question of money. He points out that proportions can be an issue. In the story of the "widow's mite" he holds up the poor widow who gives a very small amount, but since it is all that she has, her generosity far exceeds those who only tithe or who give only for the purpose of appearances. When a young man, who seems to be on a path to the Way, asks what he should do. Jesus explains he needs to love God and obey God's laws, the young man says that he does this and wants to know what else is needed. Jesus tells him to give away all that he has and follow him, and the young man goes away very sad, because he had great wealth.

The authors of the gospels show us time and again, that Jesus has a kind of flippant disregard for money, or at least the value people place on it. From his defense of Mary pouring costly perfumes on his feet, to his reply to Peter about paying the temple tax. Jesus explains that he does not obsess over money. The temple tax story is an interesting one. It is usually shared as a miracle story, but to me, I hear Peter running to Jesus in a panic about paying the temple tax and Jesus saying...uh, Peter, you are a fisherman, if you need some cash, go fish. Finding a coin in the fish's mouth is more metaphor than miracle to my ears.

I have to confess that most of my sermons are based on taking the gospel message, often parables and look for a way to make the message resonate for Christians in the 21st century. I do not think that today's parable has aged well.

Even before the parable begins, Jesus says: *"Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."* Well, these might be wise words, but they are just not relevant today. There will be basically two reactions to this quote. Either a person will say, it is true, I often buy things I want, not need and I have an abundance of possessions or the person will come up with elaborate explanations as to why they need all of their possessions. For the vast majority of human beings on this planet life **does** consist in the abundance of possessions. Today, the pursuit of a more abundant life, does not necessarily mean a spiritually fulfilling life, but a financially secure one.

So, in today's parable a rich man becomes even richer (why am I not surprised by that) and he does something reasonable, he creates more space to hold all his possessions. When he is done, he says to himself, that now he can relax, take it easy and be happy, but then God cuts in: Not so fast, tonight you are going to die and who will get all your possessions then? Well presumably the man's heirs.

Jesus then explains: *"This is the way it works with people who accumulate riches for themselves, but are not rich in God."*

Does Jesus mean that the two are mutually exclusive, or is there room for both? Can we, and indeed should we, work to accumulate riches, but also strive to become rich in God?

This idea of being rich in God as opposed to rich in worldly goods is explored in more detail with another story from the gospels, I will use the version from Luke as today's reading is from that gospel:

This is the story of the young rich man:

You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery. You shall not murder. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother.' " He replied, *"I have kept all these since my youth."* When Jesus heard this, he said to him, *"There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."* But when he heard this, he became sad, for he was very rich. Jesus looked at him and said, *"How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, 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."*

Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" He replied, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."

There are three main points I can see from this related reading: One, the person who lead a righteous life wanted to know what more he could do, Jesus told him. Let's be clear, Jesus told

the man to follow the laws but the man pushed Jesus to ask what more he could do. Jesus did not tell the man he had to give away his wealth, the man asked him.

The second point is the eye of the needle comment. I have heard sermons preached and read scholarly articles all based around the fictional fact that Jesus was referring to some narrow gate that was known by that name. A completely made up story for the sole purpose of illustrating that it was difficult, but not impossible for a rich man to enter heaven. Churches cannot afford to alienate the rich by telling them they are damned.

The third point is the question about who can be saved. *"What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."* This is most important, but I want to put a pin in this for a moment.

The truth about the accumulation of wealth is that there is one historical entity, one organization that has steadily set about to build bigger storehouses for wealth and possessions and the organization is the Christian church.

Once the church associated itself with the ruling classes, that, is the rich and powerful, the church also began to acquire wealth. Exerting power and influence throughout the known world went hand in hand with using money as a means of control.

After about 1000 years of this, one protesting Jesuit Priest decided that the church should stop looking to the poor to underwrite the lavish cathedrals they were building. Martin Luther felt that Pope Leo should use his own money to pay to finish St. Peter's instead of selling papal indulgences to poor folks. We might even go as far as saying we owe the Protestant Reformation to a dispute over money vs. faith.

But Luther had his rich supporters too. When the pope actively encouraged people to kill Luther, it was the rich ruling class that hid him away.

Yes, the protestant church was as interested in accumulating wealth as their Roman cousins. A few hundred years after Luther, we have the Clergy Reserves, **one-seventh of the public lands of Upper and Lower Canada**, reserved by the 1791 Constitutional Act for the maintenance of a Protestant clergy. For the word "maintenance" read money in the form of rental income and sale of land. This was eventually amended to include other denominations.

This responsibility to create wealth and to be able to sustain ourselves if we want to retire, or to be able to provide what we need to live a comfortable existence, has been hardwired into our concept of making a living. "Enough is a little more", is the motto of those obsessed with an ongoing pursuit of wealth.

Society encourages this, and through the media we see this confirmed on a daily basis. So what are we to do? How are we, as Christians in 2025 supposed to reconcile the need to acquire and accumulate wealth and the need to dedicate our lives to God?

It is a dichotomy that seems insurmountable. Jesus does seem to be pretty clear about what he thinks about people obsessed with money. But he also made something else pretty clear about who can be saved. *"What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."*

We need to focus on the things of God. God's laws about loving them unreservedly, and following the commandments should be first in our hearts. If there is sincere intent to love God

and care for others then little else is needed. We cannot, rich or poor, wealthy or impoverished, save ourselves. It is impossible for us, but possible for God.

Thanks be to God.

Let us Pray:

This world tempts us
with bright lights,
city streets,
tempting sights
and sounds.

This world tempts us
with objects
of desire,
raises us up,
knocks us down.

This world tempts us
to believe
we need more and more,
and challenges us
to live this belief.

This world tempts us
to reject
our God,
accuses us
and hates us.

This world tempts us
to disbelieve
the truth
that nothing can
defeat us as long as God is with us. Amen

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