

**The Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost**  
**October 13-14, 2018**  
**Mark 10:17-22**

***“Consecrated: Asking the Right Question”***

“In his bestselling new book, *A More Beautiful Question: The Power of Inquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas*, author Warren Berger argues that while we’re all hungry for better answers, we must first learn to ask the right questions. Through a number of well-researched stories, Berger demonstrates that the most creative, successful people in the world tend to be expert questioners. They’ve mastered the art of inquiry, raising questions no one else is asking—and finding the answers everyone else is seeking. In his latest book, Berger takes us inside such red-hot businesses as Google, Netflix, IDEO and Airbnb to show how questioning is baked into these companies’ organizational DNA. He also shares dozens of inspiring stories of artists, teachers, entrepreneurs, basement tinkerers and social activists who changed their lives and the world around them by starting with a ‘beautiful question.’” And just what is a “beautiful question?” Berger puts it like this: ‘I define it as a question that challenges assumptions: Why are we doing things the way we’ve done them the past 20 years? What if we tried X or Y? A beautiful question shifts the way we think about something and often sets in motion a process that can result in change’” (<https://www.americanexpress.com/us/small-business/openforum/articles/the-power-of-asking-the-right-questions>). The book’s title comes from the poet, e.e. cummings, who wrote: “Always the beautiful answer / who asks a more beautiful question.” In today’s Gospel lesson, a man comes before Jesus with a question, but is he asking the beautiful question? The right question? That becomes the theme for preaching today as we focus on week #2 of our fall stewardship theme, *Consecrated, Lord, to Thee*. May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

We get two installments of this section from Mark 10: the first half is today (Mark 10:17-22) and the second half is next Sunday (Mark 10:23-31). Sometimes this account in the Gospel lesson, found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is entitled “The Rich Young Ruler” (see Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30). Mark doesn’t say that he is either young or a ruler; he simply says that **“a man ran up and knelt before [Jesus]”** (Mark 10:17). Matthew’s account says that he is a “young man” (Matthew 19:20) and Luke’s account tells us that he is “a ruler” (Luke 18:18). But all three accounts agree that he was very rich and had great possessions (Matthew 19:22; Mark 10:22; Luke 18:23). We don’t know his name, but he addresses Jesus respectfully, calling him “Good Teacher.” The man’s question is asked in all sincerity: **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** (Mark 10:17). But is he asking the right question? Jesus directs him back to the 10 Commandments and what life with God means in relation to God and to others, to which the man replies: **“Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth”** (Mark 10:20). The man’s question and response are revealing: “What must I do?... All these I have kept...” Lots of “I” language going on here, which means that he is looking to himself and his efforts to make himself right with God and gain heaven. Do we do the same?

Mark alone records that phrase which we read together: **“And Jesus, looking at him, loved him...”** (Mark 10:21a). Out of love, not judgment, Jesus offers the man an open door to the full and abundant life which Jesus himself came to bring (John 10:10). Wherever we look, we are bombarded with messaging that tells us we will find the full and abundant life through products and possessions. Funny thing, though, that before long these products and possessions no longer satisfy us like we thought they would. We also find out that they can come to own us, rather than us owning them. From St. John’s Haiti Servant Team, we’ve learned a piece of wisdom from the people of Haiti, who tell us: “You’ll never know God is all you need until God is all you have.” The man in today’s Gospel lesson, unlike the people of Haiti, had great possessions and wealth. But behind this façade of security based on an abundance of material goods was a heart which had lost its security and delight in God. The man was searching. And so Jesus calls on him to

let these things go; sell his great possessions and wealth, give it to the poor, and come, follow Jesus. In doing so, he would know real treasure. This kind of sacrifice will not be appropriate in every call to discipleship, but Jesus did call for it in this particular situation with this particular individual. The man couldn't do it, and so he **"went away sorrowful"** (Mark 10:22). But this doesn't really do justice to the original word here, which says that "his face fell" – an apt picture of the disappointment, sorrow, and dejection that was etched on the man's face.

The point here is that whatever possessions and wealth we may have, it all comes from God, the Maker and Owner of heaven and earth (Psalm 24:1). All of these things have been entrusted to our care for a time to manage wisely and well, not just for our own pleasure, but for the good and blessing of others, especially those who are in need. When all is said and done, what the Lord desires from us is not our money or possessions. The Lord desires something far more valuable than these things; He desires the devotion and love of our hearts. That is something that you cannot put a price on. The Word of the Lord thunders through the prophet Amos in today's Old Testament lesson: **"Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate"** (Amos 5:15a). The Lord God calls us not just to avoid the evil, but also to roll up our sleeves, dig in, and get our hands dirty doing the good. The historian and statesman, Sir Edmund Burke (1730-1797), famously wrote: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing" ([https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/17142.Edmund\\_Burke](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/17142.Edmund_Burke)). And here is a tie-in to that fourth mission practice we have with joining Jesus on his mission: What is the good we can do around here? Surely that is asking at least one right question, one beautiful question.

Our greatest possession and highest wealth will not be savings accounts, IRAs, investment portfolios, and the like. We have need of these things because we have to live in this world, pay bills, put food on the table, plan for retirement, etc. All of these are a given without question. But when all is said and done, our greatest possession and highest wealth is something that cannot be calculated in monetary value. It is that simple, child-like faith and trust in what God in Christ has done for us; the blood-bought redemption that Jesus has won for us through his suffering and death upon the cross. Jesus is our priceless treasure! When we depart this life, and we all must, we can't take it with us; it all gets left behind. We can only say with Paul the apostle: **"For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of the world"** (1 Timothy 6:7). When we come to Jesus as that man did in today's Gospel lesson, asking questions that are rooted in sin and self, Jesus looks on us as he did on that man: **"And Jesus, looking at him, loved him."** That is where stewardship begins: in the saving love of God who did not spare the life of his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all. In response to this amazing and undeserved gift, what is the beautiful question, the right question, that we should be asking ourselves? It may well be as simple as this: How, then, should we live? One of the stanzas in our hymn of the day puts it like this:

*As You, Lord, have lived for others,  
So may we for others live.  
Freely have your gifts been granted;  
Freely may your servants give.  
Yours the gold and Yours the silver,  
Yours the wealth of land and sea;  
We but stewards of Your bounty  
Held in solemn trust will be.  
("Son of God, Eternal Savior," stanza 2; Lutheran Service Book #842)*

May our gracious Lord, who loves us and gave himself for us, enable us to ask the right question, the beautiful question, that will draw us closer to him, enabling us to grow as his consecrated stewards. Amen.