

Sermon October 10th, 2021

“Limitless Possibilities”

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Dear friends in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

When it comes to *a rich man*, this man, Jeff Bezos, is currently the wealthiest or second-wealthiest person in the world. If you don't know who Jeff Bezos is then think “Amazon”... and you can start to imagine how it is that so much wealth has been accumulated...and that this wealth has only been accelerated by the pandemic. Bezos is the founder and executive chairman of Amazon, where he previously served as the president and CEO and he is said to have a net worth of almost \$200.1 billion as of September 2021. I suppose when you are that rich, you could say “the sky's the limit”...but even that has been surpassed by Bezos. His dream of sending civilians into space through a rocket ship developed by his aerospace organization called “Blue Origin” was successful to accomplish this dream this past summer in July. (Now don't worry, I have no slide with the rocket ship as that got a lot of attention in and of itself.)

We'll likely see plenty more of this rocket's image this upcoming Tuesday when it is set to launch from Texas. And, the big news is that 90 year old actor William Shatner who played James Kirk in the iconic Star Trek series will be one of the passengers. Wow. Life imitating art with an actor who was a space ship captain, Captain Kirk, is now actually traveling into space. It seems when you have enough money or influence you have limitless possibilities.

To hear Jesus conversation with a young rich man and his exemplar living and earnest attempts to do everything possible. You immediately think, this young man is an achiever! This is someone who wants to get it right and live his “best life”. If you've mastered the commandments what more must it take to secure your place with God forever? You may hear this story and immediately image Jeff Bezos... or if not him, some “rich man” or “rich woman” that likely would fit this part. And that is the catch in the story. We eavesdrop of Jesus'

conversation and want to excuse ourselves from the story. After all, we are no Jeff Bezos... even if we do “pretty well” in life... Jesus extreme advice to this rich man, we conclude, isn’t really a word to you or to me. “Wealthy people”... that is someone else.

I’ve heard it said that this story of the rich man and Jesus has no loopholes. There are no excuses because whether one feels financially rich or barely making ends meet, Jesus says there is *always something you can give*.

October is traditionally the month at Bethel where we focus our attention around stewardship. We have a fantastic and dedicated stewardship team that meets all year round to help us as a congregation make sure we are mindful of our calling to give of our financial gifts all year round.... not just for a concentrated season like this one. There is practicality in the October stewardship emphasis. We are a church whose primary call is to proclaim the Gospel and we are church that has a facility and a staff and many ministries that support this mission. There is pure transparency in what it takes to “keep the lights on” around this place but there is also a hope that your financial contributions to Bethel keep us open to limitless possibilities.

What would it look like if each one of us to trust that God would use our gifts for things that might seem impossible to us, but is possible for God? When Jesus asks the rich man to sell everything and give all his money to the poor, the rich man just can’t do it. Walks away sad and defeated. He holds so tightly to what he has that he can’t possibly let it go. It is HIS after all. The disciples echo this sentiment in their exasperation as to having left everything... but it seems they are still clinging to this action as “enough” and so “who can be saved”? And Jesus makes it clear that when the last are first and when there is true sacrificial giving there are limitless possibilities. A reward... someday but in the meantime, faith that God will accomplish amazing

things when we stop holding tight to what is “ours” and loosen our grip to give and trust God will accomplish amazing things.

Recently I had a friend who went to the grocery store to help with some weekly shopping because it had been a long time since his health allowed him to contribute to some of these weekly tasks for his family. His health had also restricted what he could eat and, this may seem a bit odd, but he was so excited that he could finally eat spaghetti again after almost two years of not being able to eat it. So, here he is grocery shopping and he sees that “spaghetti sauce” is on the list. Having not been at the grocery store for over a year and not been party to preparations of spaghetti in that time. He went to the pasta aisle at the grocery store and was overwhelmed with the choices of spaghetti sauces. *Next time you are at the grocery store.... Pause for a minute and take in ALL of the abundance. ALL of the choices you have for something as simple as pasta sauce.* Since the list said “spaghetti sauce” he grabbed a couple of jars of what he thought looked good and when he came home his wife saw the sauce and said, “Oh! This isn’t right?! This isn’t the spaghetti sauce we like. We normally get...and she gave him a brand name and its specific variety.” He was exasperated first with the choices and then with the fact that HOW was he to know what was the “right” sauce? It became an opportunity to laugh and discuss clear communication with the shopping list... but it illustrates a couple of realities that Jesus is pointing to today as well.

First, we are the rich man. God has given us infinite possibilities. In our place in this world, all of us have access to a grocery store with about 100 different variations on pasta sauce. And sometimes we can splurge on the “fancy” stuff and sometimes we need to buy the sauce on sale. And there really isn’t a “wrong” choice, but there are choices to make and we do so with some thoughtfulness. Second, “spaghetti is a crowd pleaser”... at least that is what my mom

would say. In other words... given a resource, like spaghetti and its sauce... there is potential to share a meal with others. A little goes a long way and a lot of spaghetti can feed a LOT of hungry people.

Now this little analogy with spaghetti sauce is limited, of course. But suffice to say that today, Jesus is asking you to understand that you are rich. And you have things that you hold on to so tightly that you can't imagine letting them go. And, likely your money is one of those things. So Jesus invites you to imagine that were you to live from a place of abundance and not scarcity and then thoughtfully let go... what could God do with that which you hold so tightly? How could God use your gifts?

Instead of being sad, might the releasing of that grip with a generous and giving spirit bring you joy and make you glad? Amen.