

Sermon for Trinity 15 – Matthew 6:24-34

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

This coming Tuesday marks the 17th anniversary of the catastrophic event in our country's history known as 9-11. Passenger airplanes hi-jacked by Islamic terrorists set course for significant American buildings, among them being the World Trade Center towers in New York City. This was a day that you remember where you were and what you were doing when you heard the almost unbelievable reports. We gathered around televisions to watch the horrific events unfold.

But out of the ashes of 9-11 arose an almost invincible American patriotism. We would not give in to evil forces who would seek to rob us of the freedom for which so many sacrificed their lives and in which we now live. Some called this movement the rising tide of freedom. And to be sure, freedom is one of the greatest blessings God has given to America. We know it. Americans love to sing about being free. Just about every patriotic song you know celebrates this freedom. And it is, to a degree, very true. There are places all over this world where folks cannot legally and safely gather together publically to worship the Lord and hear His gospel proclaimed. Try going to Saudi Arabia; try going to North Korea to do what we are doing right now. Christians face severe persecution in the world today. God has graciously kept America free. Religious freedom is not a given. So thank God for the freedoms we treasure as Americans.

These freedoms can be a double-edged sword, however. We have the freedom here at the corner of 72nd St. and 9 Hwy to preach and teach the pure Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ. Our neighbors, the several churches within our immediate vicinity, have the same freedom to preach and teach their own version of salvation with their own Christ. Those who preach the Word purely and falsely have equal rights in this country. So to say America has religious freedom is not to say she has spiritual freedom. These are not the same thing. The land of the free is the home of spiritual bondage. If you think about it, most Americans really aren't free. They are hopelessly and helplessly bound. They are enslaved by a power that permeates every aspect of their lives.

That's what Christ is talking about in today's Gospel. And we need to heed His Word. You cannot serve two masters. One will be loved. The other will be despised. It's impossible to serve God and Mammon. He doesn't say it's inadvisable. He doesn't say it's difficult. He doesn't even say it's troublesome. He says no one can do it. You will love God or Mammon because you cannot love both. You will be devoted to one or the other because both are jealous of your affections and will not share them with the other. God and Mammon cannot be mixed together to both be willingly served.

But before we get much further, we need to talk about that old, archaic word "Mammon." Interestingly, Jesus is the only one to use the word in the New Testament.

Sometimes Mammon is translated “money,” but it really means more than that. It has to do with all material goods in which people put their trust. Philosophers call it materialism. Christ calls it what it is: Idolatry. It is worshipping the creation instead of the Creator. Mammon is a false god. And Mammon is one mean idol.

Mammon promises you everything, but it’s a trap. After he lures you to put your trust in him, he immediately proceeds to steal from you precisely those things in which you placed your trust. The promise of more and more and more things takes hold of you and gives you no peace or contentment with what God has given you. Mammon lies about God and says that He’s stingy. But when Mammon has captured your devotion and conquered your heart, he always leaves you unsatisfied. You can’t get enough. You can’t make enough. You can’t have enough. You need more and more and more. Why is that? Because we’ve forgotten the One who owns it all and who would freely give us anything we ever needed if only we would ask Him.

Now we know that an idol isn’t real. We know that an idol isn’t any god at all because there is only one God. Apart from the Holy Trinity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – there is no God. But while an idol is not a personal being, there is a personal being who uses idolatry to seduce Christians away from the one true God. Christ called him a liar and a murderer. The devil lies by contradicting God’s Word. Satan murders by enticing folks to trust in his lies.

But remember, this is our Father’s world. He is our Father and He rules over this world. He feeds the birds of the air. He clothes the flowers of the field. But most of all, more than anything else, He feeds, clothes, shelters, supports, guards, protects, and keeps His children. We are worth more than plants and animals. We are created in God’s image. We are redeemed by Christ’s blood. We are made holy by the Holy Spirit. We have value that far exceeds the value of any material thing. Our value is not determined by the market, by the government, or by any human ideology. Our value is placed upon us by our Father who is in heaven.

The reason Mammon is such a useless and ultimately cruel god is because he cannot deliver on his promises. There is nothing you can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch that will not be taken away from you. Any physical thing will be taken away from you. It’s not only likely – it’s guaranteed – that your stuff will eventually be ruined, lost, rusted, worn out, broken, or in some other way destroyed. When we put our trust in things we own and worry about not having enough, we become the most pathetic kind of slave.

Yet Christ tells us quite specifically what to value so that we can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that our heavenly Father will take care of everything we need in this world: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.”

Before we can be confident that God will provide for all our material needs so that we need never worry about having enough of this world's goods, we need to be confident that God will provide for all our spiritual needs. Before we can rest assured that God will take care of us here on earth in our times, we need to have the assurance that God will take care of us in eternity. Few people have this assurance. Few people have true freedom. This is why they cannot trust God for anything good. They don't know where they stand with Him. They don't know where they're going after they die.

The kingdom of God exists here on earth, but it's not just here. It's in heaven as well. Here on earth we call it the kingdom of grace. In heaven, it's called the kingdom of glory. But it's the same kingdom. Only those who enter the kingdom of God here on earth will find it in heaven. And there's only one door to this kingdom. It's God's righteousness. Christ tells us to seek it. God's righteousness is flawless and perfect because God is without sin. Human righteousness is never perfect because humans are corrupted by sin. So where is God's kingdom and His righteousness found?

In Christ only and nowhere else. The god Mammon demands that you acquire more and more and more while never gaining true contentment and happiness. Christ says something very different: "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yolk upon you ... and you will find rest for your souls. For my burden is easy and my yolk is light." Mammon makes you work hard for what will ultimately not last. Christ invites you to lay down your burden and put your confidence in His work rather than your own. He knows that we have failed to obey God at the very beginning of the task. We can't even make it past the First Commandment! Mammon's lies have found fertile soil in our hearts as we have worried about whether or not our heavenly Father really is who Jesus says He is. We worry about our jobs. We worry about our cars. We worry about our houses. We worry about our children. We worry about our future. We worry about our health, along with so much more. We don't believe God will care for us until we see it.

So Christ brings God's kingdom and righteousness to us. Having this, we don't need to see any more proof than the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. Look to Christ as He obeys the Father. Look to Christ who does the righteousness that His Father demanded of us all. Look to Christ who countered every temptation of the devil with God's Word. Look to Christ who turned aside anger by gentleness. Look to Christ who bears the abuse, bears the hatred, bears the violence, and bears the cruelty all the way to the death of the cross. Look to Christ and read the inscription above His head, "King of the Jews." Behold your King! Behold the kingdom of God! Behold the righteousness you need! Behold all the wealth of heaven and earth given to you!

Christ our brother has overcome every temptation to fear, love, and trust in anyone or anything but God alone. He crushes the lying head of Satan who by the idol

of Mammon would lure us into slavery. Christ persuades us that true wealth does not consist in the things we own, but in knowing Him and possessing His righteousness.

What does it mean to be wealthy? What does it mean to be without any need? What does it mean to be truly free? It means being forgiven by God through the blood of Christ. It means to know that God, having seen us in all our idolatrous sin, has love us, has washed us clean in Holy Baptism, and daily covers us with the spotless white robe of Christ's righteousness. It means to know that for Christ's sake and on account of His righteousness, we have a home in eternity with Him, where no sin can enter, and where there is no death, no sorrow, and no suffering of any kind. It means to know that we can never be poor in this life because we are the children of the One who owns everything in this world. It means to know that we can never be robbed of our freedom because Christ has once and for all set us free. We have no worries because we have received what nobody can ever take away. When we have Christ's forgiveness, we know that God will provide us with all we need in this life. This is our Father's world and we are His children. His truth has set you free, and you are free indeed. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠