

Sermon Title: **“Stewardship 1: God Is Able”**

Bible: **Mark 10:17-31**

When: on the 21st Sunday after Pentecost, October 13, 2024

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube Live Streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Intro to Stewardship

Today’s message is prepared for our church stewardship campaign for 2025. Today, I plan to talk about giving as one of my spiritual practices. On a Sunday in November, I plan to talk about our church finances.

2. Because He Loved Him

Do you like today’s scripture reading? It was not chosen by me; it is from the lectionary. After reading the Gospel of Mark in this lectionary, I think that it is a good time to start our stewardship campaign for 2025. Money is always a difficult topic not only in our lives, but also in the Bible and in the church. But money is an important and unavoidable topic, if we want to be good Christians, and if we want to follow Jesus. Jesus’ teachings in the Gospel of Mark sound very radical. Do you like today’s scripture reading? How do you understand and accept it as the word of God?

The story about the rich man was recorded in all three Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

There are slight differences when the rich man is introduced. In Matthew, this man is young as well as rich! In Luke, he is introduced as a certain rich ruler. But in Mark, he is just introduced as the rich man. It is interesting, right? But there is one distinct phrase in Mark that was not recorded in Matthew and Luke, which is “[Jesus] loved him.”

The rich man came to Jesus, and asked how to obtain eternal life, how to enter God’s kingdom. Jesus replied to him, “Don’t commit murder. Don’t commit adultery. Don’t steal. Don’t give false testimony. Don’t cheat. Honor your father and mother.” The man replied to Jesus, “I’ve kept all of these commandments since I was a boy.” Then, Jesus looked at him carefully, and loved him. After this, Jesus said to the man, “Sell what you own and give the money to the poor.” Why? Did Jesus want to blame his wealth? No. Did Jesus want to test him? I do not think so. Because Jesus loved him, Jesus shared one more tip with the rich man.

As you see, I am not Jesus. I know that Jesus loves you. And I love you, as a pastor of this church. The church is not the building, but the people. The reason why I give a message about stewardship is because I love you. Talking about money is not easy; it is challenging. There can be misunderstanding, resistance, and complaints. But love is more than that. At least two Sundays among fifty-two Sundays in a year, I decide to talk about money. And if we read the Bible, Jesus talked about money here and there a lot more than we think. Today’s scripture is just one of many examples.

Then, why did Jesus ask the rich man to sell what he owned and to give the money to the

poor? After this story, Jesus said to his disciples, “It will be very hard for the wealthy to enter God’s kingdom.” Does this mean that Jesus blamed wealth and money? No. Does this mean that Jesus blamed the wealthy or the rich person? I do not think so. I believe that God loves the rich as well as the poor. But for the rich, I believe that Jesus shared one more thing, after he looked at them carefully and because he loved them: Do not make money an idol. Money is so powerful in our society that money can be a replacement for God. Jesus knew that we cannot serve God and wealth together. It is not the issue of greed but the issue of idolatry. We need money. And we need God. What is money’s place? And where is God’s place? I believe that what Jesus is saying here is “Do not put money in the place of God.” Can we put money in the right place where it belongs, and put God in the right place of God? It is not easy, and it seems impossible for human beings. But I believe that it is possible for God. We might not be able to. But God is able!

Please do not misunderstand what Jesus said here. Jesus did not say to give up all your money. Jesus did not say to give up houses, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, farms and whatever you have. Of course, there were times when to follow Jesus meant to give up everything and everyone. At those times of Jesus and in some of our history, to follow Jesus meant to risk what we have, whom we know, and even our lives. There have been so many persecutions, martyrs, and sacrifices. Even now in some other countries, to follow Jesus means to give up everything and everyone. But how about us who are in the 21st century and in the United States? Is there anyone here who has given up what you had and your family in

order to follow Jesus? To follow Jesus, do we need to give up what we have? No. To follow Jesus, do we need to give up our family? No.

3. Make All You Can, Save All You Can, and Give All You Can.

Then, if Jesus were here, what would he say to us? Probably, what Jesus would say to us is similar to what our founder John Wesley said to us, which is “Make All You Can, Save All You Can, and Give All You Can!” Even though we all live in the 21st century, not all countries guarantee these three rules. In some countries, to make and save money might mean to steal, to lie, to cheat, or to sacrifice others. In those countries, to give might mean you are naive and foolish, because there might be more possibility to be taken advantage of rather than to be thankful. Probably, to follow Jesus means in those countries to give up everything and everyone. But how about us? To make and save money, do we need to steal, to lie, to cheat, and to sacrifice others, our family, or ourselves? No. Then, it is right what John Wesley said: make all we can and save all we can. I know that our capitalistic society is not perfect. It is not always fair. But it is possible to make money and save money without breaking what Jesus said, in God’s way. Then, why do we make money and save money? It is to give all we can.

4. Stewardship Campaign for 2025

Why do we give? Why do I give? That’s because I cannot serve God and money together. I need money. But I do not want to serve money as my God. I try to make all I can. I do not mind serving two or more churches. Thankfully, I am a full-time pastor, and I do not need to

find another job. I try to save all I can. I save pension money for my retirement and some money for my vacations and emergencies. I try to give all I can. Does this mean that I give all that I have? No. According to my financial situation, I give. There are many kinds of spiritual practices like prayer, reading and studying the Bible, singing hymns, worshipping together, serving the church, helping others, etc. Giving is one of my spiritual practices. I try to give a tithe, 10% of my income. I submit the pledge form to the church. It is my commitment between God and me. That's because I know the power of money. Money is important, and we cannot live without money, but money is not my Lord. When I give, I can control money rather than money controlling me. When I give, I can serve God beyond money. When I give, God is able to be my Lord in my life.

There are pledge forms for the stewardship campaign for 2025 at the back of our Sanctuary. If you want to choose giving as your spiritual practice, please take it home, pray with the pledge form, fill out the form, and mail it to the church. Your commitment may be increased or decreased as circumstances change. Your pledge form will be kept confidential. But the total number of the pledge forms and the total pledged amount that the church receives will be shared with the congregation, and this data will be a very helpful resource for our finance team and our church leaders to plan the budget of 2025.

Do I achieve my pledged goal every year? No. But when I give and when I try to give, God is able to be my Lord, and my King. Money cannot be my King. I cannot be my King. Where God is my King, I believe that's the Kingdom of God. How about confessing God as our

King? How about entering God's kingdom here and now?

Closing Prayer

Loving and living God, we love you more than anything and anyone. We cannot serve you and money together. When we give, please be our Lord and our King. Please guide us to enter your kingdom! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.