Pentecost 22 – October 20, 2024
Text: Mark 10:23-31
Theme: I Thought I Wanted a Rhinoceros

In our prayer of the day, we asked God to put away from us all things hurtful to us, and to give us those things that are beneficial. That's pretty much what God does for us in all things. Little children think they know what they need. They will be happy to tell you exactly what they need but, adults know better. My great nephew is a grown man now, but whenever we are together and someone asks him what he wants to drink, someone in the group will yell Pesi! Brandon, although he couldn't say it, loved Pepsi as a little kid and all he wanted for any meal was Pesi and Doritos. He thought the adults in his life were brutal and unfair for making him eat things he didn't like. He didn't want fruit or vegetables or even meat. He wanted Pesi and Doritos! Alas, the adults won and Brandon did not die of malnutrition.

We laugh at little kids and how they want ridiculous things and insist that they need them. When Noah was about 10, he put a Lamborghini on his Christmas list. It apparently did not occur to him that he couldn't drive yet. When I was little, I asked for a Rhinoceros. I don't know where I thought I was going to keep it. First get the Rhino and then worry about the care and feeding, right? Little kids are funny, but really, we're not much different from little kids. As adults, we like to think that our wants are far more sophisticated than Pesi, a Lamborghini, or a rhinoceros. But they are not really. For adults, most of our silly wants tend to revolve around monetary issues. I wonder

how many adults have prayed fervently to win the lottery. Do they not think that if God wanted any of us to have millions of dollars, we would? He does not need the lottery to make us wealthy. Look at Abraham, King David, King Solomon. God did not need the lottery to make them some of the wealthiest men ever to have lived. That's what Jesus is talking about in the Gospel for today, and that's what the Preacher is talking about in the Old Testament text. The author of Ecclesiastes identifies himself as The Preacher son of King David, so we assume it is King Solomon. The Preacher says,

"He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep."

What the Preacher is telling us here is that if we focus our energies on having more material things, we will never be content because we're not focused on God's purpose for our life. God made us to love and serve him and one another, not to acquire possessions. If we focus on loving and serving God, we will always be satisfied in life because God will bless us in ways that we haven't even dreamed of. If we focus on loving and serving one another; envy goes away,

judgement goes away, hatred goes away; mean-spiritedness goes away.

In the Gospel Jesus talks about threading a camel through the eye of a needle. The metaphor works on two levels. First, obviously the people of His day saw camels regularly and knew that it was not possible to get one through the eye of a needle. Beyond that, there was a gate in Jerusalem called the "eye of the needle" which was so narrow that traders would have to unpack their camels and hand-carry the goods through, because a packed camel would not fit. The point is that too many goods get in the way of a relationship with God.

The point of both texts is that God has given us everything we need in this life and whatever we do not have, we do not need. When we were baptized into His name, we were gifted not only with faith but also with everything we need to serve God. So, this idea that God provides us with all that we need in no way excuses laziness. God does not promise to provide for the one who does not work, because, if we do not work, we are not glorifying God. God has gifted all of us to serve him in our work.

Luther was a genius in his understanding of vocation. Vocation comes from the Latin word for calling. All of God's people have a calling, and we are gifted to serve Him within that calling. When we are serving God, we are fulfilled and happy even if we don't have a

new car or a fancy home. Material things become unimportant to us when we are operating within our vocation.

What Jesus wants us to know and what the Preacher wants us to know is that serving God within our vocation will give us everything we truly want. We might think we want Pesi and Doritos. We might think we want a Rhinoceros. We might think we want a Lamborghini. But God promises us that true joy, peace and fulfillment only come when we serve God using our gifts.

But not everyone knows what their gifts are. How do we determine our gifts? It comes through faith growth and trial and error. As we study God's Word and receive the Sacrament, our faith grows and we are empowered to try serving God. Maybe it is writing a card to someone. Maybe it is teaching Sunday School. Maybe it is serving in worship: singing or ushering or lay assisting. The point is our faith grows from Word and Sacrament and we are empowered to serve. As we try different things, soon we find our niche and that is where we can best use our gifts. Now the real fun begins. We use those gifts in service to God. Two things will happen. First, blessings will reign down on you. Second, you will experience a sense of joy and contentment that you do not experience with anything else. God has blessed us. But He wants to keep blessing us. He wants to provide every good thing for us. Keep serving Him and allow Him to shower you with His blessings.