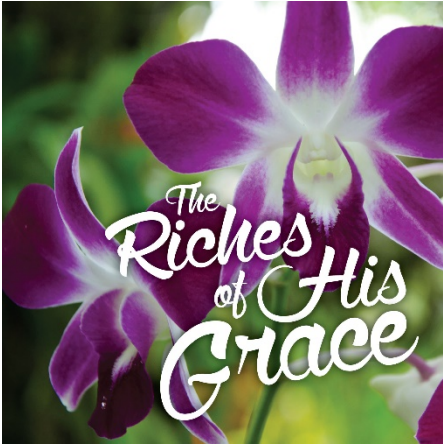


AN EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES



You've probably heard the idiom, "an embarrassment of riches". It means to have an overabundance of something or too much of a good thing. The Grand Rapids, Michigan area just celebrated "Art Prize." In one television interview, the organizer of the event commented that they had so many requests to submit art for the event that they had to turn artists down. "We had an 'embarrassment of riches' with so much art but not enough venues to display it even in a town the size of Grand Rapids." **Can you ever have too much of a good thing?** I can look in our closet at home and say definitively, "YES!" (I won't say if I'm looking at my clothes or my wife's.) I can look in my back yard with the leaves beginning to fall and grudgingly say,

"YES!" We roll our eyes when we hear a lottery winner who confesses that their winnings brought them unsaid burdens that they never expected. YES, it's true. When we have this embarrassment of riches, we must ask the question: "**What are we going to do with it all?**"

But what about God's grace? God's Word tells us that we have more than enough grace to face anything in this life. You can never use up the grace of God. God alone has incomparable, rich, all-surpassing grace for you and the world around you. Through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, we have been lavished with God's riches at Christ's expense. So....what are we going to do with it all? **Read this article** and consider the embarrassment of riches we have when it comes to the incomparable riches of grace. We are rich to share it with others!

No one likes to be embarrassed.

The devil was on the prowl one day, out to win over one Christian in particular. When he saw the Christian he desired he shot one of his fiery darts and it struck the Christian in the chest. But the Christian had on the breastplate of righteousness so he wasn't harmed. The devil shot at the Christian's head but that was protected by the helmet of salvation. The devil figured everyone has an Achilles' heel, so he shot at the Christian's feet that were shod with the Gospel of peace but, once again no harm was done. The Christian smirked and turned around to walk away in victory. But then the devil fired an arrow into the Christian's wallet and it nearly killed him. This is a fictional story but it reminds us that our pride can get the best of us - especially when it's due to an embarrassment of worldly riches.

The rich young man in the Gospel of Mark 10:17-22 had an embarrassment of riches. He came up to Jesus with great vigor saying, "*Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" (Mark 10:17) Jesus told him, "*You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me.*" (Mark 10:21) We are told that this man walked away disheartened and sorrowful, for he had great possessions. This man was likely a little embarrassed because he probably was never told that he lacked anything in this world.

No one likes to be embarrassed. A little boy asked his father, "Daddy, where do I come from?"

The embarrassed father took a huge gulp and proceeded to go into a long-winded explanation of the birds, the bees, the stork and anything else he could think of. Finally, the father turned to his son and asked, "Why do you want to know?" "Oh," he replied, "there's a new kid in the neighborhood and he's from Nashville, and I just wondered where I came from." **Now, that's embarrassing, don't you think?**

If you're like me, you were probably told as a child, "Eat everything on your plate. There are children in Ethiopia who are starving." (I have to confess that on more than one occasion I would have sent my plate to Ethiopia rather than eat things like liver and Brussels sprouts.) What our parents were reminding us was that we have an embarrassment of riches when it comes to food. We have such an embarrassment of riches when it comes to food, we think nothing of waste and throwing away good food. It has been said that if we could shift only 5% of the riches of food on our tables to those in need, there would be no more hunger or food insecurity in the world. That's enough to bring us to tears thinking of children and people going to bed hungry night after night when we have pantries overflowing with food.

The world around us is lacking that one thing: Jesus!

But the same could be said of the world suffering from grace starvation. Statistics show that 80-85% of people would attend worship if they were merely asked. But at the same time, only 2% of Christians are willing to reach out and ask someone to join them for worship. In Ephesians 1:7, we read, "*In Him [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace...*" This truth should move us to tears thinking of much of the world dying without ever hearing the Good News of the incomparable riches of God's saving grace. Much of the world around us lacks that one thing necessary for salvation: Jesus. And yet, we who have an abundance of this grace, are unwilling to share it with others.

The purpose of this article isn't to heap on guilt. When it comes to looking at ourselves in the mirror of God's Law, **we are all lacking**. Recently, I had two instances when people used the phrase, "an embarrassment of riches" with me. They are completely different. But I believe God was preparing me for His message from Mark 10:17-22 (this week's Gospel). Let me tell you these stories.

Story one: I have a neighbor that has several family members living in their home. They each have at least one car, some more than one. They have several motorcycles and even an antique car parked in their garage. But when it comes to parking all their vehicles, they don't have any more room in their garage or driveway. So they park on the street. This neighbor got my attention when I was outside. He said, "I hope you don't mind us parking in front of your home all the time. I guess we have an 'embarrassment of riches' when it comes to vehicles. Even though he was 'embarrassed' by his lack of parking in his garage or driveway, he still had no problem talking to me about it.

Story two: I was speaking to a person who was nearing death. I asked, "What is the one thing I can pray for you right at this moment?" The person responded, "I have an 'embarrassment of riches' with Christ's Body and Blood, His forgiveness and love, His presence and care. But I'm running out of time in this life to share them with others. Pray for the Good News to be shared with those in need." **(That's a prayer we can all pray together.)**

When it comes to the Law, we will always lack something. But when it comes to the Gospel and God's grace, we lack nothing! Remember the second use of the Law from catechism instruction - the mirror. As we look into the mirror of the Law, we can't miss that we are conceived in sin and deserving of condemnation. We can't miss that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and not done. The Law shows us our sin in order to show us the one main thing we lack - the means of salvation. Then why isn't our sin more obvious to us? It's because we don't look into the mirror of God's Law. Instead, we compare ourselves to others or to the filthy world, which in comparison, we sparkle. We measure ourselves by our own standard rather than God's perfection, God's perfect Law.

The rich young man seemed to have it all.

To all appearances, the rich young man appeared to be the ideal follower of Christ - he was concerned about his salvation, he was zealous. If there was ever anyone who was going to heaven, it was this guy. He seemed to have it all!

He had courage. Verse 17 says, "As Jesus started on His way, a man ran up to Him." The Jews had already decided that if anyone put their faith in Jesus Christ, he would be thrown out of the synagogue. And that is why Jewish leaders like Nicodemus visited Jesus at night. They didn't want to take a chance on being ostracized by the community. But this rich young ruler came out in broad daylight! And he ran right up to Jesus! He didn't care if people in the crowd knew who he was. He didn't care about what they might be saying behind his back. He didn't care that he might lose his job. Instead, the only thing he thought about was his "soul" desire for eternal life.

He certainly had wealth. Many people think that if only they had more money they would truly be happy. The disciples seeing this young man approach would have thought, "Now here's a guy who's blessed." Don't misunderstand the clear message from God's Word - Jesus is not declaring that to be wealthy is innately sinful - not at all! But those who have "everything" are often tempted to trust in their wealth, and those who trust in their wealth aren't trusting in Christ.

He also had determination. Verse 17 goes on to say that he ran and fell on his knees before the Lord Jesus Christ. That shows that he had a sense of urgency. He saw that Jesus was starting to leave the area and head back across the Jordan River toward Jerusalem. And he may have said to himself, "This may be my last opportunity to get the peace of mind that has been eluding me all these years. So I'm going to go for it! And I'm going to run right through this crowd and fall down at the feet of this great Teacher."

In addition, he had morality. Here's a young man who made a great neighbor and a fine citizen. Clean cut, wealthy, great social recognition - and religious to boot. There aren't too many guys like him around, right ladies?! (There's a few of us left, right guys?!)

He had the right motives. He wasn't there to test Jesus. He wasn't there to try and trick Him into saying something politically incorrect. He wasn't there because he was wowed by all the miracles. His only motive for coming to Jesus Christ was because he wanted to go to heaven! He said, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "I've been a practicing Jew as long as I can remember. I was circumcised on the 8th day. I was bar-mitzvahed as a 13-year-

old boy. I have faithfully attended worship services. I have lived according to every dictate of the Law. I have sought to fulfill my religious and my social obligations. And yet, in spite of my religion, in spite of my morality, in spite of my uprightness, there is no peace within my heart that I'm going to be in heaven when I die! And it's making me miserable! Teacher, there's got to be something I can do to inherit eternal life!"

The young man wasn't ready for the Good News until he understood the bad news.

This is true of the world around us. Many well-meaning people think, "Well, I haven't killed anyone. I've never taken anything that wasn't mine. I've lived a pretty good life." And many people are willing to say to this person, "If anyone deserves to go to heaven, it's you." The rich young man thought that there was something he could do to inherit eternal life. And Jesus had to correct this dangerous teaching before He could give him the right teaching. The problem the rich young ruler had is that he grew up in a religion that taught that you had to work your way into heaven. You have to keep all 613 commandments (the circle around the Torah - the ten original commandments) and follow all the rules - and that's why this man had no peace in his life! Because there is no way in the world a person could do all that! But this young man thought he had done everything HE COULD do to merit eternal life. Instead of arguing with the man, Jesus puts His finger on the man's biggest problem. Jesus said, "One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me."

The problem wasn't that the man had great possessions. The problem was that his great possessions had him. The irony is that a relationship with Jesus Christ would have been worth more than all the money in the world! If he would have abandoned everything to follow Christ, he would have had the priceless peace of mind that he had been looking for his whole life. But he loved his money more than he loved the Lord. And he turned around and walked away.

As sinful human beings, we keep asking the wrong questions. Therefore, we keep coming up with the wrong answers. The wrong question will always be, "How do I know if I've done enough to go to heaven?" The world and so many religions answer with uncertainty or a "to do" list that may save you, but God answers with, "You can never do enough." The right question is, "What has Christ done?" And the answer is, "More than enough for our Salvation." (Our embarrassment of riches.) The commandments Jesus listed - He kept perfectly. Jesus gave up everything He had - His back to those who scourged Him, His scalp to those who crowned Him with thorns, His feet and hands to be nailed to the cross, His side to be pierced for the world's sin, and He suffered the poverty of the criminal's cross to give us the incomparable riches of His grace and the promise of eternal life.

Share the riches of God's grace.

We truly have an "embarrassment of riches" when it comes to God's saving grace. We are broken redeemed people who once were lacking the one thing we need, but now are God's children and heirs to all the riches of the Kingdom of God. God gives us the blessings which flow from the cross. Our broken-ness is healed. Our sin removed as far as the east is from the west. We don't receive what we deserve (God's mercy), and we receive in abundance that which we don't deserve (God's grace). Christ gives us His righteousness. He makes us members of His household. He marks us with the holy cross in Baptism. We are joined to

Christ's death and His resurrection. Christ gives Himself with His Body and Blood in Holy Communion. Sin, death, the grave and the power of the devil have been swallowed up by the victory of Christ. The list of gracious blessings goes on and on. When we start to count our rich blessings in Christ we realize we have more than enough. We lack nothing. We are rich, indeed!

And with this "embarrassment of riches" poured out for us from Christ, we must ask ourselves, "What are we going to do with it all?" None of us knows how much more time we will have on this earth to share the truth that we all lack one thing and that one thing is Christ and His grace. What can be better than sharing the riches of God's grace and giving it all away for free. No strings attached. To tell someone else: "It's impossible for you to earn your salvation by having courage, determination, wealth, morality or even the right motives. Jesus freely gives you His grace which is more than enough to forgive your every sin and give you the gift of eternal life."

We have the joy of proclaiming salvation in Christ with absolute certainty because it's all about what Christ has done - which is ALWAYS more than enough. Having more than enough, we can freely share the Good News without fear of ever running out. The world is hurting. It knows something is lacking. And you have the saving truth of God's love, grace and salvation - a hope that never is disappointed. How blessed we are to proclaim: Come, follow Jesus with me!

Your Evangelization Team is eager to share encouragement with you to give God's grace away to people in need. It's not every day we get to give someone else the ONE THING they absolutely need that will last for eternity. We have an 'embarrassment of riches' when it comes to resources for bearing witness of Jesus. The Synod and our District have multiple resources for individual witnessing and congregational outreach. If you feel this tug on your heart to share the riches of grace you have received, share your passion with us at this email: evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org We look forward to hearing from you. Your stories and encouragement help us with ideas and the joy of sharing God's truth that His grace is more than enough for whatever we are facing. Thank you for all you are doing by investing the riches God has lavished on you with the world around you. *"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8).*

Speaking of embarrassment - here's one more story: A dignified, older pastor owned a parrot of which he was exceedingly fond, but the bird had picked up an appalling vocabulary of cuss words from a previous owner and, after a series of particularly embarrassing episodes, the pastor decided he would have to have his parrot put to sleep. But a lady in his congregation suggested a last-ditch remedy. She said, "I have a female parrot. She is an absolute saint. She sits quietly on her perch and prays constantly. Why don't you bring your parrot over and see if my own bird's good influence doesn't reform him?" The pastor said it was worth a try, and the next night he arrived with his pet. The bird took one look at the lady parrot and chirped, "Hi, Toots, how about a big kiss?" The lady parrot responded gleefully, "My prayers have been answered!"

In Christ Alone,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20