

**10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, August 1, 2021**

John 6:24-35

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“If I had a billion dollars I would’ve solved homelessness by now.”

“If I had a billion dollars, food insecurity would be a thing of the past.”

“If I had a billion dollars, climate change would be taken a lot more seriously in our country.”

These are all sentiments I’ve seen in response to the “Billionaire Space Race.” For the last few months, there have been 3 billionaires working to have their own personal flights to space. Really, they want to go to space because they can. They have the time and resources to do so. On July 11<sup>th</sup>, Richard Branson was the first of the billionaires to reach space. Then, on July 20<sup>th</sup>, Jeff Bezos made his way into space as well. While Elon Musk hasn’t gone yet, he’s been hard at work to find a way to make it to space as well.

All of these flights have been met with heavy criticism. When we see this sort of extravagant use of wealth, comments start flooding in on how that money could’ve been used more responsibly. One critique has been regarding the emissions that were put into the atmosphere and the damage it will do. Some believe that the costs of the flights should’ve been used to combat climate change rather than contributing to the problem. There’s also the concern that billionaires only want to go to space to establish colonies on the moon or Mars. Many are bothered that these billionaires would rather do research into creating a refuge for the rich rather than finding ways to end our homelessness crisis. Bezos gets especially harsh criticism since many believe he was only able to fund his project through the underpayment of his employees. We’d all like to believe that we’d all be more responsible with our money if we had the same resources as these billionaires.

But let’s think about it a different way – I’m sure I’m not the only one that’s thought about what it would be like to win the lottery. Right now the Illinois Lottery jackpot sits at about \$166 million. That’s some life changing money. I’ve already thought out that if I were to win, I would get a big ol’ house on lots of land so I could adopt all the dogs I could ever want. Basically I’d get to create my own little dog ranch. I’d also need to pay off my student loans. Maybe I’d get a brand new car. I could take a nice vacation. Then after I get some of these nice things for myself, with whatever’s leftover I would want to give back. I could do something like putting some money into public schools, making sure kids can have all the resources they need to be successful in the classroom.

Looking at it this way, it’s clear we think about our needs and wants first. If we were to come into that much money, I’m sure the first thoughts for most of us are things like houses, cars, retirement funds, etc. Doing the things that we need to do to make sure we are taken care of. Then, once our needs are met, we can start to think about others. We will always put ourselves first. So even though we think we would be able to put the homelessness crisis before a potential once in a lifetime experience of going to space, I think the choice would be harder for us to make than we believe.

Our selfishness and our belief that we know best isn't a new problem either. We see this in our reading from Exodus. God has graciously rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. And not only that but they finally get to return to the promised land, a land full of milk and honey. But this journey is tough. They are starving in the desert, so the Israelites start to question this whole process. They start to think about what they would do if they were in charge instead of God. They cry out that they would rather return to slavery and be fed rather than be free and starving in the wilderness. They think they know what's better for them.

Yet, even with their complaints, God still comes through for the Israelites. Even though they have done nothing to deserve it, God brings mana to them each day. God fed them so that they could continue their journey to the promised land even though it seems like all they have done is complained.

Then in our Gospel reading today, Jesus is fresh off of feeding 5000 people. The crowds have seen what he was able to do and they want more. If he can feed all those people when he only had a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread, what else can he do for them? What other miracles can he perform? The crowd pushes him, trying to see what he'll give them next.

But Jesus doesn't give them what they want. Instead, he goes off about how he's the bread of life. Rather than just giving them the miracles they want to see, he takes the time to remind them why he's really there. You can almost hear the crowd groaning at this point. They would be saying things like, "Ok, we get it Jesus. You're the bread of life. Can we get the cool stuff now?" They just don't get it.

This gospel reminds us that our priorities are off. We're like the crowd, and we just don't get it. We know Jesus has the ability to do amazing things, and we want Jesus to help us in the ways we think would be best. We think Jesus should change Jeff Bezos' priorities and get him to focus on climate change rather than going to space. We want God to just take care of everything for us while we reap the benefits.

But we forget that God did already take care of everything and we get the benefits without deserving them. Through Jesus's death and resurrection, our sins can be forgiven even though we don't deserve it. Despite our sinful nature, God goes to great lengths to restore God's relationship with us. Thank God for that, because if it were only up to us, we would be in big trouble.

Because let's be honest, we haven't done the best job of loving and serving our neighbors. Even though we have enough money in the world to end homelessness, we haven't done that yet. We have enough food in the world to feed everyone, yet we fail to feed the hungry. The problem isn't that the Billionaires aren't spending their money correctly. The problem is our sinful human nature. We always need to put ourselves first before we can even think about helping others.

Yet despite all these failures, God hasn't given up on us. After hearing all of our complaints, God still comes through for us. Even when we think we know best, God is there to remind us what we really need. God still believes we are still a vital part of bringing God's kingdom into this world. We see over and over again how God uses those who are less than perfect to continue God's mission in the world/ Even when we fall short, God continues to push us to turn away from our selfish nature so that we can help care for our neighbors without an address, to feed our hungry neighbors, and to protect our world

from things like climate change. Jesus is the true bread of life which sustains us to stop just thinking about ourselves continue his work in the world.

While we haven't been able to solve these problems yet, there is hope because of God still working in and through us to solve them. There is hope because this work is continuing with us, as we out in the community and doing what you can to help your neighbors. God is working with us all as you all sustain the ministries here at Grace and also through the other various community organizations that work to take care of our neighbors. There is hope because of organizations like ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response that continue to do God's work in the world and helping those in need. There is hope because God is still alive in this world, and continues to work in and through every single one of us. We can have faith in the Kingdom of God because God still is working to create this world for and with us, even when it seems like we don't deserve it.

So may we turn from our selfish ways, and continue to have hope in all the ways that God is working in and through us, and may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and our minds on Christ Jesus.