

Sunday 05/26/24 – Panama Methodist Church

Sermon Title: “The Rich and the Poor seek Him”

New Testament Scripture: John 3:1-17

Old Testament Scripture: Proverbs 22:2

Gospel Scripture: Matthew 28:19

Gospel Scripture: Mark 16:15

Before I get into my sermon for this morning, I first want to acknowledge that tomorrow is Memorial Day. All soldiers gave some in service, and some soldiers gave all. Some gave their very lives. Tomorrow there is no school, and some have the day off from work. This day “off” however, came at the highest of costs. I will be proud to march with our church, and our church float, in part, to honor those men and women who paid the ultimate price for our freedom. Freedom isn’t free. Saturday May 18th, was “Armed Forces Day.” Armed Forces Day honors soldiers who are serving, and all who wore the uniform, in general. Tomorrow once again is for our brothers and sisters who never made it home.

What I want to show you is a video that I have been showing churches for years. What you are about to see is from 1985, and while it doesn’t mention women soldiers, we are honoring them to, today, tomorrow, and always.

(Slide 1 – Memorial Day Tribute Video)

May we long remember our brothers and sisters who died for our freedoms, and may we march with pride and attend tomorrow, as we do so. We will also advertise our upcoming Vacation Bible School, as well.

Another thing that I have done at churches for a long time is read what I call the “Bixby Letter”. I first heard about this letter watching the Tom Hanks movie “Saving Private Ryan.” In this World War II movie, all of the character Private James Francis Ryan’s (played by Matt Damon) brothers had been killed in combat, and only James Francis Ryan (played by Matt Damon) remained alive. In one of the scenes in this movie, General George Marshall, is taking with some of his officers and debating on whether or not soldiers should be diverted to locate and pull Private James Francis Ryan out of combat in the European theater, to bring him back home. To break the tension, General George Marshall read the “Bixby Letter”. Let me read it to you.

If anyone here has served in the United States Military or has family that has, whether the US Army, US Air Force, the US Marine Corps, the US Coast Guard, the US Navy, or the US Space Force, please stand and be recognized by a grateful pastor and a grateful congregation. Also, while we are honoring the military today, may we all show honor to those in law enforcement, fire fighters, all first responders, teachers, school employees, and medical workers, who are all

on the front lines each and every day. We have heroes in our midst church, and we should never take that for granted.

With all this my message for this morning is called “The Rich and the Poor seek Him!” Above my church office door is a sign that says, “Wise Men Still Seek Him”. Which means therefore that when I enter the church office, that a wise man in entering. Or at least what I tell myself.

Jesus Christ our Lord calls all manner of humanity to come unto him. In one of churches, I served there was a CEO of a decent sized corporation. He had a lot of power and a lot of wealth, yet he was humble, generous, and kind. It is not a sin to be successful, but it is a sin to be selfish, unkind, and uncaring. Throughout the two-thousand history of our faith, the lowest to the highest members of society have sought Christ. A church that includes all people. People that need to hear the gospel, need Jesus, who, including the pastor, need to repent of there sin. People at every level of society need Jesus Christ because guess what, whatever he have in the earthly sense cannot save us. This scripture tells that we leave this world as we entered it. We all need to believe in the Bible, repent, and come to Jesus. We don’t need to hate ourselves or think badly of ourselves, but we are trying daily to be more like Jesus.

If God blesses us in the earthly sense then, let us be generous, let us help others. Earthly success is not a sin, if God uses us to bless others. What is amazing

to me also is that this church has been here for almost two-hundred years, and it exists because the people of this church believe in Jesus, the Bible, and our faith. This church exists because we believe in it. Guess what your new pastor believes in this church, and he believes in you! The Christian Church as far as our faith is not in jeopardy, as the gates of hell cannot overcome the church, but together we can accomplish great things.

I want a church then that continues to foster and includes all manner of people, from all levels of society. Why? The answer is, is because Jesus came to save all. We all need Jesus, and the church is place where we can all come to hear the good news, repent, and come closer to Christ. This is a place where we all need to continue to change, including your pastor. We are not saying stay dead in your sins, what we are saying though, is that we all have to continue to change. We as a church, no matter who we are, no matter our education level, our financial wealth level, our social status level, etc., all fall short of the glory of God in Jesus Christ. So, who is welcome to come hear the gospel, repent, and turn from sin and darkness? All of us. Who is good enough on there own without Jesus? None of us. This is the church that Jesus started almost two-thousand years ago, and the church that has taken root all over the world. So, if you think you are unworthy of being in this place, then I would say we are all in the same boat there. In a way we are not a church, we are hospital, and we all have the spiritual sickness of sin. After we

come to Christ, the same temptations and struggles are still there. As a church we move, live, and grow together, no matter who we are. We are a family in Christ, and this family includes all kinds of people. Amen?

This morning in our gospel lesson from John 3:1-17, Jesus is visited at night by a Jewish Pharisee or religious leader named Nicodemus.

(Slide 2 – Jesus and Nicodemus Picture)

This picture is taken from the show “The Chosen,” that I know many of us have watched, on the life of Jesus Christ. Nicodemus comes to Jesus in secret at night because Nicodemus can’t deny what Jesus was saying and doing every day. Yet, Nicodemus did not want to risk his wealth, his power, and his position as a high up religious leader. On the night that Nicodemus came to Jesus, Nicodemus became a follower of Jesus. How many people here to be honest have never heard of Nicodemus in the Bible?

(Slide 3 – Jeff Foxworthy - Nicodemus)

Well, if you haven’t, now you have! Nicodemus not only became of follower of Christ’s in John 3:1-17, but he also helped wrap, anoint, and prepare Jesus’ body for burial in the Tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Jesus was entombed for three days in a never before used tomb of another man and rose from dead in the same tomb.

Let's look more closely at our scripture from John 3:1-17 for this morning.

If you have bible or your bible app, turn with me to the gospel of John 3:1-17, and I will be reading out of the NRSV.

(Slide 4-7 – Gospel of John 3:1-17)

Nicodemus Visits Jesus

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’ ³ Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’ ⁵ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’ ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ ‘Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷ ‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (Jn. 3:1-17, NRSV).

I find it interesting that one of the most well known verses of scripture was Jesus talking to a highly educated and affluent religious leader named Nicodemus.

Not the patch you put on to quit smoking, but the Pharisee Nicodemus. Jesus, God in the flesh is teaching someone with a lot of knowledge, maybe a lot of college degrees, and a lot of material wealth, that he, Jesus is the truth. Do you know who can understand who Jesus is? Just about everyone. It doesn't matter what your rank or status in society is, as the "The Rich and the Poor seek him!" No matter what our lot is in life, we all need Jesus, and we all need redemption.

I think of the story of the billionaire who got permission to bring his financial wealth to heaven. Would anyone here want to bring anything to heaven with them? If so, what would we take to heaven with us? This story is a made-up story, but I did see a picture of a man in a large clear burial box on his Harley Davidson. Maybe he thought he could take his Harley to heaven, or he just wanted to be buried on top of it. I don't know.

The made-up story of the billionaire keeping his financial wealth goes like this, a billionaire was dying of a rare disease. He was given about two months to live, and he decided therefore that he would liquidate all of his financial wealth. Why would he do this, you ask? Well because this billionaire wanted to take all of his financial wealth and convert it all into gold bars. Well, he did it, and he had many heavy cases of gold bars. The billionaire's pastor then came to visit and pray with him, and while there the pastor asked the billionaire why he had these black cases. The billionaire explained to his pastor, that he was going to convince God to

let him take all of his cases of gold bricks to heaven. Well, the pastor told the billionaire, “I don’t think God will let you do that”.

Well, that night before the billionaire fell asleep, he prayed and begged God to let him bring his cases of gold bars to heaven with him. As the billionaire slept that night, the Angel Gabriel came to him, and the Angel Gabriel said I have been sent by God to ask you about your cases of gold bars. The billionaire convinced Angel Gabriel that bringing his cases of gold bars to heaven was a good idea. So, the Angel Gabriel went back God, not that the billionaire need a middleman, but this is just how the story goes. God agreed, the Angel Gabriel returned, and the billionaire was ecstatic.

About a month later, the billionaire passed away, and when he did, he suddenly found himself in this unending long single file line of people. Everyone including him were wearing the same white outfit. The line seemed endless, but it seemed to move fairly quickly. Then suddenly the billionaire noticed floating next to him were all of the heavy cases of Gold bricks that he had on earth near the time of his death. As the line moved and the billionaire walked forward, the case floated forward right next to him.

After a little while though, suddenly over what seemed to be a loudspeaker system, he heard his name announced, and he was told to come to the front of the

line. So, he got out of the line, and of course the heavy cases of gold bricks floated right next to him.

The billionaire then walked and walked next to what seemed to be an endless single file line of people all wearing the same white outfits. After a little while of walking, the billionaire made out in the distance what appeared to be a desk, and the line appeared to end there. As he got closer, he saw a man sitting behind this desk, as the heavy cases of gold continue to float next to him. The billionaire finally got to the desk, and saw the Apostle Peter there, with the pearly white gates behind him processing people into heaven. I know scripture doesn't say this about the Apostle Peter and the desk, but it is just part of the story.

Peter then said to the billionaire, "I called you to the front of the line, because I heard that there was a man with heavy black cases up here, and that has never happened here before". The billionaire then said very proudly, "well I prayed, and the Angel Gabriel showed up, and then he talked to God for me, and I got permission". Peter then said, "Gabe said that?" The billionaire said, "yes, he did".

Peter then said, "well ok then, but before you bring these heavy black cases into heaven, I want you to put one of the black cases on my desk so I can see what is inside". The billionaire agreed, and when the Apostle Peter opened one of the heavy black cases on his desk, and suddenly this bright golden light emerged out of

the case. The Apostle Peter then realized that it was gold bricks. At this he then started laughing uncontrollably. The billionaire then asked the Apostle Peter, “What’s so funny?” At this, the Apostle Peter started laughing even harder, so that he had tears on cheeks. At this, the billionaire is now getting a little frustrated, so he asks the Apostle Peter again, and now the Apostle Peter is now rolling on the ground laughing. The billionaire then finally blurts out, “What’s so funny!?” The Apostle Peter then says to the billionaire, “you know how the streets of heaven are paved with gold?” The billionaire then said, “yes, I have that it is”. The Apostle Peter then said, “we have a ton of potholes to fill in on our roads up here, and I think your cases gold bricks will be just enough to fill them all in. This must be why God allowed you to bring all your treasure up here with you”.

Whatever we have on this earth does not save us, and we can’t take it with us. The Christian Church has always been for everyone, as we all need Jesus, and all we all need a savior. When it comes to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, “The Rich and the Poor seek him.” He is the savior of the whole world, and the world is everyone. For “The Rich and Poor seek him!”

We read in the Book of Proverbs 22:2

(Slide 8 – Book of Proverbs 22:2)

²The rich and the poor have this in common: the LORD is the maker of them all (Pro. 22:2, NRSV).

We all need Jesus, we are redeemed through his blood, for two-thousand years the Christian Church has had all walks of life. We are called live by the authority of the Bible, serve Jesus as Lord and savior, and draw all people unto him. We can also church, wait for it, have a little fun together to, amen? We all come to this place to seek to grow closer to the one died for us. We can do this in a variety of ways, and I said last Sunday, I am going to be inviting us all to consider joining a small group in the coming weeks, so that we might be even stronger as a church family. We are stronger together.

(Slide 9 – Matthew 28:19)

We read in Matthew 28:19:

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (Mt. 28:19, NRSV).

The gospel of Jesus Christ, to all the world, to all people. A church for everyone, but a church where we all continue to be transformed by Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are also reminded in Mark 16:15 this:

(Slide 10 – Mark 16:15)

¹⁵ And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation (Mk. 16:15, NRSV).

The gospel for everyone, as “The Rich and the Poor seek him!”

In these being Memorial Day Sunday, and also Trinity Sunday, I want share with you all a story in closing that is a good Memorial Day story. This is a story that all people can relate to and connect to. This story is called **“Whoever Takes the Son Gets it All.”** Here is how it goes:

“A story is told about a wealthy man who, years ago, shared a passion for collecting art with his son. Priceless works of art by Picasso, Van Gogh and others adorned the walls of their family estate. One year, war engulfed the nation, and the son left to serve his country. Soon his father received a telegram. His son had been killed in the line of battle. Distraught and lonely, the old man faced the upcoming Christmas with anguish and sadness. On Christmas morning, a knock on the door awakened the depressed old man. As he opened the door a soldier greeted him who was holding a package. The soldier said, “I was friends with your son. I have something to give you.” The soldier mentioned that he was an artist and then gave the package to the man. It was a portrait of the man’s son. Overcome with emotion, the man hung the portrait over his fireplace, pushing aside millions of dollars’ worth of art. The following spring, the old man died. The art world waited with anticipation for the day when his paintings would be auctioned off. According to the will drawn up by the old man, the art would be auctioned off. The day finally arrived and art collectors from around the world gathered to bid on some of the world’s most spectacular paintings. The auction began with the painting of the man’s son. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid, but the room was silent. “Who will open the bidding with \$10?” No one spoke. Finally, someone said, “Who cares about that painting? It’s just a picture of his son. Let’s move on to the good stuff!” The auctioneer responded, “No, we have to sell this one first. It’s right here in the will. Now, who will take the son?” Finally, a neighbor of the old man offered \$10. The neighbor said, “I knew the boy, so I’d like to have it.” The auctioneer said, “Going once, going twice sold.” The gavel fell. The auctioneer looked at the room filled with people and announced that the auction was over. Everyone was stunned. Someone spoke up and said, “What do you mean, it’s over? We didn’t come here for a painting of someone’s son. There’s millions of dollars’ worth of art here!” The auctioneer replied, “According to the man’s will, whoever takes the son gets it all.”

Whoever takes the son gets it all. That’s the message of Luke 2. Whoever takes the son gets it all”

Friends, “The Rich and the Poor seek him!” and whoever comes to the only son of God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit gets the inheritance of heaven. Amen.