

"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1). Really, everything? Certainly not everything. Not my talents, my creativity, my imagination, and my time. *"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;" (v. 1).*

We live in a culture and an era that's trained us from our earliest days to think in terms of our lives built around self-sufficiency and ownership. We're bombarded with messages every which way we turn, that the goal of life is simply to acquire and accumulate more, to build equity, to secure our future through our own effort and ingenuity. The American dream itself is life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Now hear me carefully. I'm not saying that the things I just listed above in those three different categories are inherently wrong. Not at all. But what I am trying to name is that we've been conditioned and formed in a culture that's taught us to see ourselves primarily as owners of our own destiny. We've been shaped and formed by economic systems and governing bodies that celebrate and reinforce self-sufficiency at such a level that it almost feels like the law of gravity. It's the water we swim in. It's the air that we breathe.

We've been trained to believe that what we earn is ours. What we build is ours. What we accumulate is ours. We measure success by what we own. We measure power and influence by our titles and how busy we are. We measure our worth based on our tax brackets. For most of us, including me, we find our meaning, including me, perpetually worshipping at the altars of accumulation and accomplishments, buying into the myth that what we achieve and what we buy will somehow satisfy the deepest aches of our hearts.

So how in the world do we reconcile the prophetic and poetic words of the psalmist? The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. Just three weeks ago, we started a new practice at CPC called Vocation. And for the next year, we're attempting to live out what it means to steward our God-given identity, to cultivate and create good in the world. So last week, Josh continued that idea of what it means to work in a group project mentality, extending the garden project throughout all of creation.

So, over this year, we want to try to get into the nitty-gritty of what it means to actually live this practice out in reality. We believe that one way to accomplish this, while not the only way, is to take on two habits, open-handedness and contribution, and so for the next six months, focus on this habit of open-handedness. We'll preach on it for four weeks. If you're in a community group, which I encourage you to do, you'll be talking about these sorts of things, and then we'll spend time as a congregation trying to live open-handed in the very ordinary of our lives.

Open-handedness is the habit of stewarding our time, talents, and treasures as channels through which God's abundance flows to others. We live in a world that wants to posture ourselves as owners, but really, what does it look like for us to live more as stewards than as owners? Or as worded here, channels in which the abundance of God, because the Earth is the Lord's and everything in it, may flow through our lives and into the lives around us.

What I want to do this morning is to begin with asking the question of what is the foundation of a life lived open-handed? What is the way that we orient ourselves to creation? How should we, as followers of Jesus, orient ourselves towards the created order? Because it's in that orientation that I believe we can get to a place where a life of open-handedness flows a little bit more freely.

Because everything in our world is aimed against this concept that we live open-handed, and so we need to begin at the beginning, right at the foundation. What does it take for a life to live in that orientation where the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it? Now, I like this word "orientation" because it helps speak to the totality in which we're trying to talk about this—a fullness of your life. To orient yourself towards something is to adjust your whole being towards it, every part of you. One of the other reasons I like this word is that there's an Old Testament scholar by the name of Walter Brueggeman, and he has a helpful way of talking about the Psalms. He says there are three categories of Psalms. He's an academic, so he's making this up, but it's helpful. He says, "There are psalms of orientation, Psalms of disorientation. And then Psalms of new orientation." And if you've spent time in the Psalms, you may understand why he gives those three categories.

Psalms of Orientation help aim our lives at that which is true in the world. That which is in fact reality. Psalms of Disorientation is when the author seems to need a hug. It's where they're saying, "My life is crumbling. I'm down in the pit." It's when the reality of what we know is true is confronted by the brokenness of this world. That causes a disorientation.

And then he talks about this third category, Psalms of New Orientation, where on the other side of that, the faithfulness of God continues to perpetuate through creation, and we all of a sudden have a new orientation on the other side of brokenness. Well, Psalm 24, where we're going to be this morning, is a Psalm of Orientation, and I believe it's a psalm that will help us do just that, orient our lives.

In your Bibles, flip to Psalm 24:1-2. We're going to be in a few places this morning, but we will anchor here, and then we'll launch into the Gospel of Luke, just to give you a heads up. Psalm 24, beginning in verse 1-2, *"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live*

in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters." So I've repeated this phrase a few times already, but he begins with this pretty grand statement. "The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it," but then he does this other one, "the world and all who live in it." So it's a way of the author saying, both the created order and its inhabitants, everything orients around the reality of God.

But why can the psalmist make this statement? Well, look at verse 2: "*for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.*" Now, if you're a keen reader of scripture, the establishing it on the waters should remind you a bit of a song we just sang on the Spirit hovering on the waters, that's an illusion all the way back to Genesis 1, at the very beginning of the created order.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:1-2). See, in the beginning, God created before anything, before all things, before existence itself—God created. And then the idea of the heavens and the earth is what God created. That's a very Hebrew way of saying absolutely everything. He created all of it. God is the only one existing outside of existence itself, outside of time. He creates absolutely everything.

And then you get this phrase: "Now the Earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God was hovering over the waters." This idea of formless and empty, that's what the psalmist in Psalm 24 was talking about. God created the earth over the waters. It's that great Hebrew phrase I've used before, and I know many of you remember. It's the *Tohu va-vohu*, which is worth saying, right? Formless and *Tohu va-Vohu*.

That phrase literally translates to formless and void. But it's more than that. It's the biblical author's way of trying to articulate utter nothingness, utter chaos, utter void. It's the author honestly running into a bit of trouble to describe existence before existence. Because words themselves, language itself, is a product of being alive. If you are created, trying to describe that which was before creation becomes problematic. So just think of utter nothingness, which is impossible because you're thinking of it right now, which makes it a thing.

There's a philosophical block here that we're talking about. It's the idea of complete disorder, complete emptiness, and complete formlessness. It's into this reality that God speaks worlds into existence.

**By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He
gathers the waters of the sea into jars, he puts the
deep into storehouses. Let all the earth fear the
Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. For
he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it
stood firm. Psalm 33:6-9**

Here again is where poetry is helpful in trying to understand what it means for creation to come out of nothing. The theological term for this is a Latin phrase called *Creatio ex nihilo*, and you might recognize *ex nihilo* from the idea of nihilism. It means creation out of nothingness. And there is unanimous agreement among Christian theologians

of every stripe that God alone is the one who can create *ex nihilo*—out of nothing.

God alone is the only being, the only thing in all the created order, who, in fact, can create out of nothing because it turns out he's not from the created order, but rather the created order is from him. God created *ex nihilo*. We cannot create from nothing. We create from that which God has created all of our work that we've been talking about for the past two weeks.

In some ways, the metaphor that's been helpful is playing with God's Lego, but we didn't create the Lego. It's me, like I did last night, looking into my kitchen and seeing the flour and the yeast and the salt and the sugar, and the pepperoni and the tomato sauce, and making pizza. I generated the pizza, but I did not generate flour, salt, yeast, and tomatoes. That's God's work. Even if you have a lovely garden at home, a pizza garden, if you will, you still did not create the tomato seeds. That is God's work. That is God creating *ex nihilo* out of nothing.

We then take those things and form and create. But notice the way this postures us and orients us towards creation. If God alone is the thing in which all being is created, all angels, bacteria, dark matter, dirt, sweat, blood, everything, the universe in its totality. If all of that stems from God, that alone is God's creative works. That fundamentally changes the way we look at the created order. Almost in the way the psalmist would say that the Earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

This means a few things for us. First, God did not create the world out of preexisting materials. He spoke the breath of life. That was what came into the world. Second, no other agent or principle served alongside God in the creative act.

It was God and God alone. God is again the thing that exists outside creation. One hint of this is remembered in Exodus. When Moses is like, Who do I say sent me to go confront Pharaoh? Do you remember God's response? "I Am." That's God's name. But it's more than that, isn't it? It's why it sounds so clunky in English.

Because we don't have a concept or a philosophical category for a being that just is. God's saying, "My name is I am. It is existence itself. "I am existence and it is therefore, from that, the created order is birth." Think of another category. This means that God alone is sovereign over the created order for only God exists, exist, existed outside the created order.

Fourth, God is that to which all created beings are then ordered. If you are the one who creates everything, you too are the one who holds the understanding of how it is to operate. Think about this in Romans 11:33. It is a wonderful text in which Paul, who has this brilliant New Testament mind, had an encounter with God, and it radically set his life on a new trajectory.

So he has written this beautifully dense, brilliant piece of work, called the Letter to the Romans, and about 11 chapters in, you see him almost overwhelmed with it. He just bursts out in praise in a doxology like we opened our service with. He says this.

**Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom
and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his**

judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them? For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. Romans 11:33-36

Then he goes on to write nine more chapters or so filled with wonder at this God, for from him and through him and for him are all things.

Let's go back to that imagery in Genesis 1, God speaks into the world and the universe, and everything is created. But then, if you know the story, it goes a little further. And after creating that order, he places or he takes dirt of the ground, that material order, and he fashions it into Adam, this dirt bean, this person, this human, and it says that he breathes life into that dirt bean. Somehow, this combination of material and the Spirit of God being breathed into him, he becomes a living thing.

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it because life itself is gift. It does not become a creation and a living being until the Spirit of God breathes his life into the nostrils of Adam. You are here today, whether you confess the Lord or not, as a gift of life itself. The breath in your lungs, that all belongs to the Lord. The blood pulsing through your veins is nothing but sheer gift. See, the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. All of life is a gift we did not earn. We do not deserve breath, but God lavished it on us; existence itself is a gift.

Let's return to Psalm 24:3. It's the author now trying to put the world back together. In his mind, it's the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. He found it on the seas; he established it on the waters. And then he has got a few questions, which we should as well.

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god. They will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God their Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob. Psalm 24:3-6

Notice the four things that are listed, two in the positive and two in the negative. Who can ascend this God, who can come to this God? The first two are those who have clean hands and a pure heart. There are positive things. It's the recognition, it's the reorientation, it's to realize I am not actually the creator. Even though I always buy into the myth that I am, even though I believe I am the owner of my destiny, that I am the one who actually is in control of my life. It's a reorientation. The one who can ascend the mountain, who can go to this God, is the one who has clean hands and a pure heart.

But then it goes to the negative, and it helps us understand the two that are positive. The other two are those who do not trust in an idol or swear by a false God. Now this makes sense. If, in fact, the Earth is the Lord's and everything in it, that means any idol or any other false God is only derivative somehow from this God who creates *ex nihilo*. If out

of nothing, God creates everything, an idol is simply making something God created to try to make it everything.

So you cannot ascend the throne of God, not because he's angry, not because he's upset, but because you're searching amongst the pizza for the creator of the flower. You're searching amongst that which is derived from God for God itself, and it simply cannot live up to that. Now, that's a silly example to talk through with pizza, but let's place it into something maybe a little bit closer to home.

We do this often with all the things in our lives. Think of the way in which you derive meaning and identity from your work. Your work is good and healthy. We've been making that argument for a couple of weeks, and we'll continue to. It's what you were created to do, but let's make sure we keep it in check.

It is never meant to be your God. Your work is derived from the creator, *ex nihilo*, who creates out of nothing. If you seek meaning and purpose in your whole identity from something that was created, it will ultimately fall apart. You cannot ascend the mountain of the Lord because you're searching elsewhere.

Do you see it? We do this with our relationships. We do this with our children. We do this with our loved ones. We do this with our toys and our trinkets. We do this with all of these things. We buy the myth. We search for meaning at the altars of accumulation and accomplishment, thinking they will fill the eternal vacuum that's been placed in your heart. And all the while, God is saying, You can find it here with me. The earth is mine and everything in it, and I breathe life into you as a gift. Because I want you to experience that. I want you to experience this world. Listen to the way Eugene Peterson talks in his little tiny book called *Praying with the Psalms*.

The joyful confidence imparted to us by a good creation is matched by an immense responsibility to live as loved creatures. Our inner (heart) and outer (hands) life are aspects of a single discipleship that responds to God's trustworthiness. Eugene Peterson

He says, if the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, and God has bestowed, gifted, and granted us life itself, we have an immense responsibility to live as loved creatures. Do you see that? It's rare to give a gift to someone that you don't deeply love. God has given us the gift of life. Because he loves us, he created us from that place. All of life is a gift because he loves us.

What this all means, or where it leads, is that our basic orientation to all of our lives should be this gratitude. Gratitude is the basic orientation of our lives in God's world. Gratitude is the posture that rightly orders our life with the material world, recognizing it as a gift. Gratitude decenters the self and centers God. It works within us so that when we are filled with gratitude, we begin to see the love of God in such a way that it moves us. But often gratitude isn't our first response for a litany of reasons, but gratitude is that which again, should posture and orient our hearts.

It becomes the foundation of how we live open-handed, because gratitude is the recognition that whatever it was you're holding was not yours to begin with. Gratitude is the foundation of a life of openhandedness.

Now I want to flip to Luke 18 because I want to ground this a little bit. This has been a little like 30,000 feet in the air. A little more philosophical, and I want to bring it into the real-life context of two particular stories that the gospel writer Luke writes, and I believe very intentionally placed right next to each other, that deal with things that the author wants us to compare and contrast, that deal with the posture of someone who is orienting themselves towards the created order. I want you to see two figures, and the way they orient themselves towards themselves and the created order.

A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." Luke 18:18-25

It's a familiar story. I'm guessing you've probably heard this, and if you haven't, you've probably at least heard a part of that teaching. And when Jesus says it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, there's not really any way to pull the punches in this. This is a difficult teaching. Jesus says how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

I'm hoping you're making the connection already about why it's so hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. It's because, well, the rich tend to be those who have accumulated much, who have accomplished much, and honestly, they're finding their meaning in those places. They are, in the words of the psalmist, seeking idols, worshiping false gods. It can be quite easy to get caught up in that because this idea of wealth and accomplishment disguises itself as our self-sufficiency.

And if we really want this to touch home, we have to recognize the privilege and wealth we possess in this world. From where I sit in the grand scope of the earth and everything that belongs to the Lord, I have much, which means when Jesus talks about the rich, he's talking about me. He's talking about the comfort and security I have. The privilege it is to make pizza on a Friday night, to have a weekend, and the day when I can rest in the presence of God. Where I can have a job, and I can have a house, warmth, and comfort.

When Jesus says, "How hard is it for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, He's certainly talking about me. I am that. So what was it, though, in this young ruler that oriented him in such a way that Jesus gave this

teaching? What we recognize is that Jesus immediately gives an answer you don't expect. The man asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

The first thing Jesus does is say, "Do you remember the commandments?" That's not quite the answer that we'd expect, but he does that. He begins to lay out the kingdom of God is a reality. Now, that's what we talked about in the Sermon on the Mount Series, and there are certain ways in which you live into that reality here and now.

Don't murder, don't become angry, don't do all these things. And he lists some of the ten commandments, and he says, "This is how you live into that eternal life now." And the man is quick. "I've been a Torah observant boy since I was a child. I've done everything right." Jesus, lest you forget, I'm the in crowd. I've done the things I'm supposed to. Believe me, I've done those things, and piercingly Jesus looks at him and says, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you'll have treasure in heaven."

Then the invitation that Jesus is constantly putting before all of us, "Come follow me." It's a tragic text, what unfolds, because the man says walks away sad because he knows his great wealth. It's as if Jesus touched the one thing that he knew was hindering him. Even though he went looking for a way into eternal life, the man went away sad because he recognized his great wealth.

Jesus looks at him again. "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God." And then we go on in verse 26, we pick up the scene, and there are those who are surrounded here, and they ask the question you all are asking, at least I hope so. Because it's the question I've been asking, "Those who heard this asked, 'Who then can be saved?' (v. 26). Who can actually live up to that?

"Jesus replied, "What is impossible with man is possible with God." Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!" "Truly I tell you," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life." Luke 18:27-30

Jesus responds to the disciples who are listening and who ask the question that I hope you are asking. Essentially, he says, if you live open-handed with everything, that is how you enter into it. The disciples, it cost them much. They walked away from family businesses. They walked away from what they knew. They began to follow this rabbi who didn't have a home, who didn't have a place. But what they found was like a man walking in the field who stumbles across a treasure and, in his joy, he finds and sells everything he has because he recognizes the eternal life, the kingdom of God.

So that's a parable Jesus would tell because it's what he's trying to get us to orient ourselves toward the world. Like that parable about finding the treasure is not about what you give up. It's about what you found. And these disciples have found something. The struggle is for the rich, and how hard it is for us to enter the kingdom of God. It's because we have a hard time seeing the treasure that is life with Jesus.

Listen to the way one lexicon defines the word rich. The noun "rich" refers to material assets, property possessions, and money viewed as usable resources rather than abstract wealth. In every New Testament context, it points to tangible means that can be spent, transferred, given, or hoarded. Now, here's where it's really important. The focus is never on currency as such, but on what it reveals about human allegiance and the advance or hindrance of the gospel. The term on Jesus' lips immediately after his encounter with the rich young ruler is his declaration, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God."

It confronts the heart bond that possessions can create. The difficulty lies not in possessing money but entrusting it, a trust incompatible with childlike dependence on God. With this rich young ruler, it wasn't so much the possessions and the wealth, but the attachment that those things had created. A dependence on self-sufficiency that is incompatible with the childlike dependence on God. Who then can be saved? Jesus offers a bit of hope, and he will in the next story, just a few pages over, but he does say with man it is impossible; it is possible with God. It is not that the wealth can totally corrupt, but rather there is a way in which you can live and be stewards, channels, if you will, of the abundance of God who flows through you into others.

It's rooted in the gratitude that the earth is the lord's and everything in it, and your very life and breath is a gift. If we begin to reorient ourselves, that's the problem with the rich young ruler. He did not orient himself towards that.

So let's look just one chapter over in Luke 19. I believe Luke puts these two stories right next to each other because, in one sense, you see this comparing and contrasting. What you'll see in Luke 19 is another story of another wealthy person coming to Jesus, trying to understand what this whole thing is all about. But we'll see a very different response.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man by the name of Zacchaeus was there; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." Luke 19:1-7

Do you see the correlations? It's another man, who is wealthy, coming to Jesus, and this is not the first time Jesus, or as Zacchaeus has shown up in the story earlier in Luke 3, you'll see him there as well, and you see a transition, a change in the posture of Zacchaeus.

But here in Luke 19, Zacchaeus is this wealthy man, but it's not just that he's wealthy; he's a tax collector. Whenever you read that, it is the biblical way of saying he's not with the in-crowd. He's not the Torah observant young ruler who is supposed to be on the inside. The tax collector is the one working for the enemy. He's working for Rome. He's working

for the oppressor. His great wealth came from cheating the people out of their taxes by adding a little bit more on top of what Rome was already oppressing the people with and shaving some of that.

That's how Zacchaeus had achieved his great wealth. So when the people begin to mutter, because he went to be with the guest of sinners, let's not discount what they're seeing there. They're furious. This is the guy who's been threatening their existence. This is the guy who's gotten wealthy by trying to take the family's lands. They're furious, but Jesus looks up at the tree, and he says, "Zacchaeus, you're the person I need to be with. I want to stay at your house immediately."

So now we're left in this moment in which the crowds are turning on Zacchaeus and Jesus. Zacchaeus is there, and how will he orient himself towards the reality that Jesus is right in front of him? This is the invitation. This is what we see.

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now, I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Luke 19:8-10

You see two different stories with two different postures. Zacchaeus was taken by the embrace and the invitation of Jesus, in which the kingdom of God was right there standing in front of him. "Zacchaeus, in light of that invitation, I want to stay at your house. I'm welcoming you in, I'm embracing all of who you are."

Zacchaeus says, "I'll give up every, I give up half of everything I have, and if I've cheated anyone, which certainly those in the crowd have been cheated, I'll pay back four times." And Jesus responds differently than he did to the rich young ruler. For the rich young ruler, it was "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God." Yet not a chapter later, a very wealthy tax collector enters the kingdom of God. Salvation has come to this man today. What is impossible with man is possible by God.

I believe that the difference between these stories might be summarized in a word. Grace. Grace is God acting in our lives to do what we cannot do on our own. Grace is the reorienting power of sheer gift. Grace is Jesus saying, "Zacchaeus, I need to stay in your house. You are the perennial outsider, the one in which everyone hates," yet Jesus says, "Would you welcome me in your home?"

Grace is the reality of God's presence in a broken world. Grace has the profound ability to loosen a heart of stone. Grace has the ability to relinquish the tight grip of perceived ownership. Grace reframes reality to see that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world in all who live in it. Grace breaks in. It opens our eyes to the reality that all of life is a gift, that the breath in your lungs is gift. We have nothing. We are nothing. We possess nothing. Everything in our lives belongs to God, and that is grace.

Grace is what the rich, young ruler was confronted with. It was the grace of Jesus that spoke to his heart when he invited him to recognize his great wealth, and yet he couldn't release it. Grace is what confronted Zacchaeus to say that his wealth and how he got it, who he was as the outsider, was not the truest thing about him. The truest thing about him was that Jesus, as a representative and God himself, had bestowed a gift on him.

These two stories offer us two reflections. How do we respond? How do we orient to the reality that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it? Do we respond with a closed heart of self-sufficiency or with an open heart of gratitude? The Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, said, "Grace and gratitude belong together like heaven and earth. Grace evokes gratitude like the voice of an echo. Gratitude follows grace like thunder and lightning" (Barth). It was the grace, the thunder that rattled through that fig tree that brought Zacchaeus down, and it was the lightning response that trickled because his eyes had seen the grace. His eyes had seen the invitation that cut through his tight fistiness. Grace evokes gratitude.

Brennan Manning, an author, a lifelong alcoholic, a priest, and a beautiful writer, wrote:

The deeper we grow in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the poorer we become—the more we realize that everything in life is a gift, the tenor of our lives becomes one of humble and joyful thanksgiving. Awareness of our poverty and ineptitude causes us to rejoice in the gift of being called out of darkness into wondrous light and translated into the Kingdom of God's beloved Son. Manning, Ragamuffin Gospel

What Manning is getting at isn't so much that we become materially poor, although that may be the case, but rather when we all of a sudden realize that the Lord who everything is his, embraces and says, can I stay at your house? You become a lot poorer because you realize this was never ours to begin with. I'll give half of it away; if I've cheated anyone, I'll compensate them four times over, because it's not mine to begin with.

Church, the foundation of a life of open-handedness is a soul that's been transformed by grace and a life that then is lived from the posture of gratitude. That's the only way. It's what the psalmist is getting at, and so much of our finding meaning at these altars of accumulation and accomplishment is us trying to hold tight-fisted to being self-sufficient.

It's Adam and Eve reaching out and taking a bite of that apple, saying, "God, thanks, but no thanks. We will call the shots here." It's the rich young ruler walking away sad. It's like he was not ready to give over that depth. But what does it look like to be encountered by grace? What does it look like to let gratitude swell up in your heart? Because it begins

with that posture, that reorientation, that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

That's what we're after over the next few weeks and the next year, trying to learn to live out of our immense responsibility of being a loved creature. You are loved by God. The life you have is evidence of that sheer gift. The dirt that God formed a human out of was nothing until the Spirit of God was breathed into him. Pure gift. All is grace. All is gift. And as we come awake to that reality, I believe we start to loosen the grip on these idols and false gods we worship at because we recognize how foolish it is.

I just want to point out three simple steps. The first is just to start practicing simplicity. We are tied to our possessions. We do have some heart bond with them. Our human allegiance is pulled towards money and possessions and those things. So I believe the starting practice is very simple. Every single one of us can do that. We begin with gratitude. That's the foundation. That's what I've argued for the last 40 minutes or so. The next step is to begin to identify where your attachments are. Where are the things like the rich, young ruler, in which God is saying one thing you still lack, and you're holding it so tight, whether it's your time, talents, treasures, whatever it is, you identify those attachments.

Then you slowly take on the third and hardest step of all. You surrender them. You allow the grace of God to intersect with that area of your life. And you say, "God, how would you have me use the little bit of the earth that is yours? How would I use that?" That's the invitation. What does it look like this week to spend some time thinking through that?

Take a deep breath, consider that this breath itself is a gift from God. Each breath is a recognition of God's grace in your life. As I've been talking, I just wonder if you've observed something in your life like that rich young ruler. Jesus is just saying, still, one thing you lack, just observe your life. Where does your mind go? Jesus had a specific invitation for both the rich young ruler and Zacchaeus. What is the invitation for you?

It could be the way you're spending your time, the way you're using your talents and skill sets, a possession, or a treasure that has a hold on you. Just ask the Spirit, "Lord, what's the invitation for? How would you have me use whatever this thing is that you've offered to me?"

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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