

The Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost – 2021

Ecclesiastes 5:10-20

Hebrews 4:1-16

Mark 10:23-31

Yogi Berra is a cultural icon that the younger set may not be familiar with so let me catch you up a bit. Yogi Berra was a ball player, a catcher by trade. Yogi played 18 seasons with the New York Yankees and won 10 World Series championships during that time. He was a workman-like ball player, back when that sort of thing mattered. His face was distinctive. At first, only his mother loved it but as he became what he became, everyone loved it. Berra stood only 5'7". He served in the Navy during WWII and was part of the invasion force that stormed Omaha Beach and Utah Beach at Normandy, France. Mr. Berra was awarded several commendations for his bravery. But it was as a philosopher, a quipster, a master of the malaprop – an absurd misuse of words – that Yogi reached his zenith as a cultural contributor. He confuses me.

When you come to a fork in the road... take it. Always go to other people's funerals; otherwise, they won't come to yours. When asked why he longer went to a St. Louis restaurant, Yogi said, "No one goes there anymore; it's too crowded." He confuses me. The Beatles confuse me. First, they sing: "Money don't get everything, it's true; what it don't get, I can't use. Now give me money, that's what I want." Then they sing this: "Say you don't need no diamond rings and I'll be satisfied. Tell me that you want the kind of things that money just can't buy. I don't care too much for money, cause money can't buy me love." The Beatles confuse me.

Politicians confuse me. One says that he will be the most transparent fellow ever and then turns out to be the most obfuscation-minded character ever elected. Perhaps I am easily confused.

St. Paul confuses me. He writes: "What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (Romans 7:15). "What I do is not the good I want to do; but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing" (Romans 7:19). Actually, I totally understand that. I am confused about many things in this life and that confusion embarrasses me regularly, but that bit from St. Paul, I totally get it. We run across confused people all the time (boy howdy!), like that character from last week's Gospel lesson, that rich, young ruler who asked Jesus what good thing he must do in order to inherit the kingdom of God. He was confused. God's kingdom is a gift. The Lord Christ won it for you by His blood. We don't earn it. We could never meet God's standard. But the Son of God kept the law in your place, the Son of God died in your place, bearing your sin, rose again to bring you life and ascended into heaven to prepare a place for you. You are saved by grace; Christ's blood, Christ's merit, Christ's kingdom is all given to you as a free gift.

The rich young man was confused. Do you know what confused him? It wasn't Yogi Berra or the Beatles. His wealth confused him. His sinful heart confused him. His outsized ego confused him. Heaven's eternal treasure, the incarnate Son of God, stood real as life right in front of that young man, (full blooded, present and accessible), and that fellow's confusion sent him away sad. What's worse, that fellow's confusion sent him away lost. Heaven's treasure, Christ the Lord, stood right in front of that lad and sang salvation's song to him: "Follow me" (Mark 10:21). But the rich young man had no ear for it, the man's face fell, and he went away sad

because he had great wealth. Give me money; that's what I want. It's ironic; his own possessions robbed him; robbed him of treasure in heaven. To be sure, he was confused.

Have you ever been confused? My mother tried to teach me how to play bridge but I could never get the bidding business straight; too confusing. Other people got it, so I know that it makes sense, but my mind was locked up in a straightjacket. Have you ever been confused? The dictionary defines "confused" as "the state of bewilderment, or to be perplexed." I like my definition better: to have your mind locked up in a straightjacket. Our sinful flesh confuses us. Our sinful flesh calls good evil and evil good. Our sinful flesh does what is right in its own eyes and rebels against authority, genuine authority, God's authority. Our sinful flesh pretends, engaging in pious charades – telling us that we *can serve* both God and our own bottom line. Our sinful flesh justifies our pet sins, defies God's call to repent, gossips with pleasure, and parades our supposed spiritual beauty in front of others. We are confused.

A boxer who has received too many blows to the head is said to be punch drunk. A pugilist who has had his cage rattled can be confused in the ring. What is the remedy? Smelling salts. Smelling salts, ammonium carbonate, wakes you up, makes you breathe faster, elevates your heart rate, elevates your blood pressure and brain activity. Smelling salts puts confusion to flight. In the spiritual realm, for us confused sinners, what is our smelling salts? God's Word – the law in all of its sternness and the Gospel in all of its sweetness. "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:23). That is smelling salts for our materialistic culture. The television you watch, the magazines you read, the internet you surf – buy, buy, buy, glorifying the rich and famous, promoting the idea that the more you have the happier you are – it's all rubbish. Wealth can rob you. True treasure is deeper, more satisfying, more lasting. The world and the desires of sinful man are passing away. The One who does the will of the Father remains forever (1 John 2:15-17).

Smelling salts... here's a little dose: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25). You are punch drunk. The world and its unholy priests have advocated for a faithless pursuit of things. Confused, you need to be reminded – wealth can easily become your god. Assets, possessions, bank tokens will not get you through the eye of the needle. You need a different sort of wealth. You will never earn this wealth. With man, this wealth is an impossibility, but with God all things are possible (Mark 10:27). God humbles Himself (makes Himself small) and makes the womb of the Virgin His throne – He came into this world in order to go through the eye of the needle – the boundary of death. *It is possible* for a virgin to bear the Son of God. *It is possible* for Jesus to feed a multitude with five barley loaves and two fish. *It is possible* for Jesus to change washing water into wedding wine. *It is possible* for Jesus to raise a four-day-dead Lazarus. All things are possible with God. In Christ, divine wealth spreads to humanity.

Confusion attended Jesus' miracles. "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?" (Matthew 8:27). Confusion surrounded His words: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Confusion circled as Christ the King was crucified. "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40). Even now, after the resurrection, after two thousand years of uninterrupted grace, after two thousand years of lavish forgiveness for every type of sinner, after two millennia of Christian beauty and joy and hope

and all the gifts which Christ freely gives through His Word, through His church, there is still confusion – obstinate and unyielding and willful confusion.

But with you, with you there is clarity. You know that you are rich. The poverty of the King on the cross is your wealth and you know it. The crucified flesh of God's Son is your treasure. The Lord Jesus is the One who did the Father's will. In humility, Christ our King made Himself small; small with the poverty of our sin. He passed through the eye of the needle, through death and the grave, to open the kingdom of heaven double wide. You know that you are rich. The purse of your heart holds the treasure of Christ. Contentment is His gift. The mouth with which you receive His body and blood is the bank where the Risen King deposits His virtue, His triumph, His kingdom. You know that you are rich. Clarity breaks in on us confused people when we stand for His Gospel, when we kneel to receive His body and blood, when we fix our eyes on His cross. You know that you are rich. Easter makes us impossibly rich. The wealth you have been given is Christ's righteousness, His fidelity, His beauty. Let there be no confusion; death and the grave are shattered, the Lord Christ lives, and we are rich.