

- Market in Pennsylvania, and I was struck by the culture-denying reality, but also certain accommodation. Why, for instance, deny modern dress yet accept modern running shoes? I don't know. I mention this to suggest that even the rejectors of dominant culture must make some adjustments to live in the world. The problem is a real one. Some Christians, on the other hand, have chosen to eliminate the problem by assuming that culture and Christian faith are the same thing in the modern West. In America, this position was well represented by episcopal bishop William Lawrence of Massachusetts. In 1901, he wrote that now we are in a position to affirm that neither history, experience, nor the Bible necessarily sustains the common distrust of the effect of material wealth on morality. God, he said, godliness is in league with riches. He was the forerunner of some contemporary American Christian leaders who equate Christian faith with American values, including the materialism of middle class life, and our national defense policies. Most television evangelists and independent popular preachers are silent on the morality of second homes or expensive recreational vehicles in a nation where many persons barely get by. I could go on citing examples of the ways in which Christians have tried to handle the relationship between Christian faith and culture. But it's enough to say that while some have gone to the extremes of rejection of culture or total acceptance of culture, most have tried to avoid either baptizing culture or condemning it, and have tried to live with some degree of ambiguity and tension. Reminds me of the wealthy man who came up to his pastor and said "I'm getting old, and I'm sick. "Do you suppose if I leave everything to the church, "I'll go right to heaven?" And his pastor replied, "It's worth a try." I have a friend who accuses theologians of being in the business of complexification. And it is true that in my lectures and sermons I find myself often saying that most ideas are more complex than we usually allow. H. L. Mencken, the sage of Baltimore, once observed that to every complex problem, there are 10 simple answers, all of them wrong. This is the kind of problem we've got in this gospel text. The problem of the rich young man is complex, it is difficult, and there is no easy answer. Now do you feel frustrated? So did the disciples. We find ourselves at this point joining in the chorus with those exceedingly astonished disciples, then who can be saved? Now the answer to this question as John Wesley often remarked is the pivotal answer for humankind. Men and women by nature want to trust in themselves, in their goodness, their creative potential, their material possessions. Here we really get to the heart of the problem of this sermon. Where is the source of our trust and hope? Our own efforts, our own intelligence, our own knowledge, our own art, are all ultimately for nothing apart from God. None of us, you see, can do enough to merit salvation. We literally cannot do all that Jesus demands. And I think that that is exactly why he demands so much. We are left hopeless if we rely on ourselves. The institutions, the governments, the organizations of this world cannot save us. The university, for instance, has been for some a source of hope, but as a human institution, the university is profoundly limited. As Margaret Clapp, a former president of Wellesley College once remarked, modern universities have been more successful in helping men and women wage war than in helping us wage peace. Perhaps Matthew Arnold was right in his classic description of the university as home of lost causes. The point is that apart from God, we all live in a home of lost causes. In the words of the classic prayer, forgive us Lord, for we have preferred our wills to thine. But thank God Jesus did not leave the astonished disciples in despair. The third section of today's gospel lesson includes Jesus' remarkable reply, "With men it is impossible, but not with God. "For all things

are possible with God." There is no hope for the rich young man or for any of us here this morning if we trust in ourselves and the things of this world. Our only hope is trust in God, because all things are possible with God. The good news is that this grace of God is given unto us without regard to our ability to perform the exceptional. This is the good news that Jesus gives to His disciples. It's the good news for us today. Where do you put your trust? The rich young man put his in his possessions, perhaps some of us in institutions, in our possessions, in material goods, in status, in reward, in award, you find your own. But the truth is that only trust in God ultimately makes any difference. My prayer is that all of us this morning will go forth out of this place with new vision to see the truth of Jesus' message, to understand what is really important in our life and to know that that vision is possible as a gift of God, amen. (light organ music) (choir singing)

- Let us unite in the historic confession of the Christian faith. I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only son our Lord, who is conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead, and buried. The third day he rose from the dead, He ascended into the heaven and sitteth at the right hand of the God the Father Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting, amen. The Lord be with you. Let us pray. Gracious God, having come into your presence, having heard your word, having sensed your touch upon our disordered lives, we now intercede for others. We pray that the world may live in peace. We intercede for the victims of violence, those who suffer because of war, the victims of terrorism, the sufferers under Apartheid. We pray for all ministers and teachers of the church, that they may be faithful servants of the Gospel, leading others to your truth and strengthening their faith. Particularly we pray for the ministry of your servant, Dennis Campbell, giving thanks for his work in the training of future ministers of the gospel and leaders of the church. We pray for the leaders of this nation, asking for them the patience to pursue peaceful means of settling international crises and courage in the face of shrill calls for retribution and violence. We pray for those who are sick, those who are facing serious surgery, particularly those who may be doing so at Duke University Hospital. We pray for those who are confronting the choice of whether or not to place someone they love within a nursing home or an institution for the mentally ill. As the Lord who reached out and healed, we know your compassion for those who suffer in body or spirit. We pray for the poor, the millions who are hungry, countless mothers who see their children perish from disease, brothers and sisters for whom this good world is reduced to unending misery. And may we be so bold, O God, to pray even for ourselves. Do not send us away sorrowful, O God, blessed as we are with many possessions and great material wellbeing. Teach us the limits of our affluence, the impotence of our power, and we shall be wise. Train our eyes blinded by our selfishness upon the needs of others. Thus may it be possible even for us to know the things of eternity, which make for life, amen. As a forgiven and a reconciled people, let us offer ourselves and our gifts to the God who has offered so much to us. (somber organ music) (choir singing) (uplifting organ music) (choir singing)

- O God, it is right to give you thanks and praise, not content to let us be. You came to us, exposed our faults, God, filled us with visions of possible impossibilities, judged us, loved us, and prodded us to be all that we could be by your grace. Therefore, we offer these gifts, and we offer ourselves as reasonable and holy surrenders to your will in our world. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our

trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen. (upbeat organ music) (choir singing) (upbeat organ music)

- The grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. (upbeat organ music)