

"Trade?"

Text: Matthew 11:2-11

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father, who created us, from our Savior, Jesus Christ, who rescued us, and from God the Holy Spirit, who brought us to faith and preserves us in the same. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians; I suspect that everyone over the age of, say, 40, has figured out something they are just not good at. For me, setting aside ballet for the moment, picking investment stocks certainly has to be at the top of the list. I was, in fact, so bad at it, someone could probably have done really, really well by just doing the opposite of whatever I did. If I were to buy shares of a company, it would be an excellent time to short it. If I shorted a company, rest assured there could be no better company in which to invest. For a time I thought about offering my services to Fortune 500 corporations. If they wanted a competitor ruined, all I had to do was buy a few shares in that company. Instant ruin. If I bought shares in a company, manufacturing plants burned down, bankruptcies were declared, key employees died unexpectedly, and embezzling was suddenly discovered.

Yet no matter how bad I was, to this day I comfort myself with the thought: *"At least I'm not Ron Wayne."* Most of you are familiar with Steve Jobs, one of the founders of Apple. Some of you may also have heard of his partner, Steve Wozniak. The man almost no one has heard of is Ron Wayne – the third partner, who owned 10% of the company he helped found at his home in 1976. He described his role as *"the adult in the room."* Convinced that Jobs was mismanaging the company and that it was going nowhere, he sold his 10% share in Apple for \$800 only a few days after it was formed. Today, 10% of Apple would be worth almost \$100 billion. Bad trade. And the bad trades continued. Jobs continued to make offers to Wayne to rejoin the company. Mr. Wayne steadfastly refused. He did still possess the original contract paper signed by Jobs, Wozniak, and himself, which he sold for \$500. In 2011, the contract was sold at auction for \$1.6 million.

Bad trades. Yet it would be foolish and unfair of us to pretend that we don't make even *worse* trades on almost a daily basis. Money often does more harm than good. The rich and the poor are all equal at death. Our bad trades are often in things spiritual, where foolish trades can have eternal consequences. Our text will not only explain, it will provide much needed wisdom and spiritual growth for each of us. That text is found in the Eleventh Chapter Matthew's Gospel:

^{ESV} **Matthew 11:2-11** *Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" ⁴ And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." ⁷ ¶ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is he of whom it is written, "'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'" ¹¹ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

So far the Words of God. Since these are God's words, certainly they are worthy of every bit of time, study and meditation we could spend on them. That our God would bless our study of these words today, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

Begin, if you would, by asking yourself a question: *Would I ever agree to permanently trade places with someone else?* Understand that you would have to trade *everything* – not only possessions, but also the way that person feels, believes, and reasons. Everything you have becomes his or hers and everything he or she has becomes yours. If the offer is all or none, most would decline. Most would love to trade for *some* things (looks, money, singing voice, talent, charisma, wit, hair, etc.) but it would be just too creepy to think of trading *everything*. More on this in a minute.

Next question (which will move us in the direction of our text): *If I could, would I consent to trade my life for that of John the Baptist?*

Another disturbing question when you really think about it, isn't it? The man's diet was grasshoppers and wild honey – the acquiring of which, by the way, is often problematic. He wore the roughest and most uncomfortable of clothing (camel's hair) and he lived in the wilderness alone – a truly brutal existence. As a Nazirite he never

cut his hair, never drank anything with alcohol, never married. He lived a bitterly lonely life and died a horrible, violent death (beheaded with a sword) at a relatively young age, never having known wife, children, or grandchildren. His message was one of stern rebuke and condemnation, and that message was largely rejected by all but a few devoted followers.

Who among us would choose such a life? Our answer is a self-condemnation of each of us, for it provides irrefutable evidence of just how "this-life-minded" we really are – how ready and willing we are to trade something eternal for the shallow and temporal.

Jesus in our text called John **"the greatest man born to women."** That, in itself, should be enough to seal the deal. He was the Great Forerunner to the Promised Messiah and he no doubt will enjoy for all eternity a special place in God's presence. He was the living fulfillment of an ancient prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah! Yet who today would trade places with him? Again, we love our comforts way too much - this world and all that it has to offer. We are all "near-sighted" sinners – loving ease and pleasure way too much and God way too little. What is more, we fear deprivation of any aspect or portion of the life of ease to which we have grown so accustomed.

When we put our problem into tangible terms, it is a window into our souls that we routinely pick the known and immediate. That is part of what we discover about ourselves in this text when we examine our own hearts with the question concerning trading places with John the Baptist. We love the here and now sure thing. We have a real problem when it comes to living this life with a constant view toward the next.

We would, of course, like to have it both ways. Who wouldn't want the eternal honor that belongs to the Forerunner of the Messiah? Only not if it means giving up tangible comforts here and now in exchange.

We choose so poorly, and our choices are frequently anything but an example of the willingness to trade places that our Lord wants to see in his children. God be merciful to us, sinners.

This is, in fact, exactly why our Lord Jesus decided to trade places. Jesus "traded places"? Four questions present themselves: 1) With whom did he trade, 2) What did he give up, 3) What did he get in return, and 4) What was the result for the other party in the trade?

The answer to the first you ought to know well, since it was with *you yourself* that Jesus traded places. You were a condemned sinner without any idea as to how to stop your own slide into hell. Nor did you even care. None of us did. Jesus Christ was the only one who could have saved us from hell and devil, and from ourselves. That, by the grace of our merciful God, is exactly what he did - by trading places with *us* – you and me.

What did Jesus agree to give up when he traded places with us? Nothing less than the perfect bliss of heaven. Think of that for a moment. Not that we can rightly imagine what heaven is really like (since it is immeasurably grander than anything that we mortals could ever imagine) but we can still gain a partial, imperfect impression of the blissful perfection that Jesus had to leave to trade places with us. What did he gain in the trade? We are embarrassed to say. For all of his trouble and sacrifice, Jesus got in return a lifetime of deprivation and hardship. He began with the indignity of being born in an animal barn and laid first in a feed trough. Things only got worse from there. Despised and rejected for speaking always and only the truth, Jesus was condemned to the most shameful death reserved for the worst of criminals. There he died, nailed to a Roman cross.

Yet, unbelievably, that wasn't yet the worst of it. For trading places with us, Jesus wasn't just assigned a tortured death, he there had to pay the sum total of every single sin ever committed by every single human being ever born. What horrors our Lord there must have endured. **"God made Him (Jesus), who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** (2 Corinthians 5:21) That was the great trade that took place when Jesus came to this earth. He took *our* sins; he accepted *our* death; he suffered *our* punishment. Think of the love that Jesus had for you to do this, and to do it *willingly* in your stead.

What was the result for you and me? What did we get when Jesus traded places with us? Isaiah answers beautifully in his magnificent 53rd Chapter: **"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."**

While Jesus' lot was torture and death, we got peace and healing and eternal life in heaven.

Despite our coldness and apathy, despite our utter sinfulness even after we have been brought to faith, despite our repulsion at the thought of living and serving our God as did the man known to Jesus himself as "the greatest born to women," still Jesus traded places with us and made us heirs of the very heaven he willingly left to save us. How good and merciful our Savior is to make such a trade with every single one of us, for ***"the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."***

For one last insight into our hearts, we return to the question we asked earlier: *Though we balk at the thought of trading places with John the Baptist, would you instead trade places with anyone else?* Again, difficult question, isn't it? Would you trade places with the President of the United States? With a movie star? A professional athlete? Bill Gates or some other billionaire? Never. Why? Jesus' words in Matthew 16:26 come to mind: ***"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"*** You and I know, after all, what it is that we believe; and we know that saving faith has been created in our hearts and that we are heirs of heaven. No amount of temporal wealth, fame, or popularity could ever be worth the eternal comfort that is even now ours. What heaven-bound Christian would ever want to trade places with any other individual? You know and believe in Jesus Christ. What more could a sinful human being ever expect out of this broken world?

There is, finally, one last trade of sorts that our God wants us to make. Every single day we are surrounded by souls that don't yet know their Savior. That Savior wants you to trade places with them. Not in the sense of taking on what is theirs, but by putting yourself in their position. This is what true Christian love is all about. Project yourself into that person's world. If you were that person, what would you want a Christian to do for you? I'd want him to share with me what I need to know about Jesus Christ – even if I were to resist or ridicule him. I'd want him to persist. I'd never want him to give up. The point is that you and I possess, even now, at this very moment, exactly what every unbeliever needs to be saved. This is, in fact, exactly how we are supposed to approach our mission work and outreach. This is exactly how our love for neighbor ought to compel us. The summary of the 2nd Table of the Law is to ***"love your neighbor as yourself."*** We are loving our neighbor less than ourselves whenever we approach our outreach to him with less urgency than if we had actually traded places with him. So we ought to reach out to our neighbor as though we had actually traded

places with him, and with the attitude that our own salvation is at stake. Assuming we think and feel on Judgment Day as we do now, imagine how foolish we would then feel for withholding the words of eternal life from a friend for the sake of temporal friendship. Instead, trade places with your neighbor in spirit, and reach out to him with the natural urgency that such a trade would certainly create.

At the end of his answer to John's questions in our text, Jesus added these telling words: ***"Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me."*** Jesus, the simple man from Nazareth, might not be what sinful mankind is looking for, but he most certainly is what every single one of us needs. Cling firmly to the salvation that is yours through the trade that he so selflessly and lovingly made with sinful mankind, and be courageous enough to share the facts of that trade with the souls our Lord also wants to rescue. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Isaiah 35:1-10** The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; ² it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. ³ Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. ⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. ⁸ And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. ⁹ No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. ¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

^{ESV} **James 5:7-10** Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Third Sunday in Advent – December 15, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 68 (Red Hymnal)

"The Advent of Our King"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 35:1-10) Our first lesson today can be read with the eyes of reason, or with the eyes of faith. The Jews read them with eyes of reason and still today miss their true fulfillment. You and I obviously want to read these promises with the eyes of faith, and know that they stand fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the New Testament Christian Church that he came to establish.

Psalm of the Day – Psalm 85 (Supplement page 40) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (James 5:7-10) No one ever said that waiting for Jesus' Second Coming was going to be easy. On the contrary, truly living and working according to the will of our Lord (while we wait) will always bring hardship and suffering. This is the message of our Epistle lesson, where James encourages us to be patient and watchful to the very end.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 72 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers"

The Sermon – Matthew 11:2-11 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Trade?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 72 (Stanza 4) (Red Hymnal)

"Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 50 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (40) Average (40) Wednesday (16)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Advent Service
Saturday	-10:00 a.m.	– Christmas Eve Rehearsal and party
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Christmas Eve Rehearsal (No SS/BC)
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:30 a.m.	– Fellowship Meal
	-12:15 p.m.	– Annual Voters & WF Meetings

CLC News – Pastor John Hein is considering the professor call to ILC. Pastor James Albrecht is considering the call to Berea of Sioux Falls. Pastor Norman Greve has returned the call to Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich.

Confirmation Class and Advent Services – Confirmation Class again begins at 5:45p next week, followed by our final Midweek Advent Service at 7p.m. Note also **Christmas Eve rehearsal** this Saturday.

Church Council Notes – All members of the Church Council were present for the meeting on December 8. Offerings fell short of budgeted needs in November by \$2,160, and now trail YTD needs by \$536. The fluorescent bulbs in the fellowship hall will be converted to LED. Brian F., Loren O., Phil P., and Ty J. have agreed to be placed on the ballot for the two expiring Council positions. The 2020 Usher/Cleaning list is available for review. Phil P. will consolidate the proposed Church Security Policy, to be presented at the Annual Meeting. The Council will investigate digital online storage of St Paul's records.

Annual Meeting Announcement – The Annual Voters Meeting is scheduled for next Sunday, December 22 – following a fellowship meal. Mr. Timothy Meyer has applied for voting membership. The **Women's Fellowship** is also scheduled to meet at that time.