

Recently one of our families invited me to stop by their home after ~~the~~ first communion Mass to celebrate with their son. I rang the bell, and the first communicant himself opened the door. I rarely see a smile as broad as the one on that kid's freckled face that afternoon. Then, before ~~he even said hello~~, *he walked in the door*, he held up a fistful of envelopes he was clutching, called out to me, "I got 35 whole dollars," and ran back into the playroom with the other kids. I laughed; I mean, kids are kids. The parents were ~~terribly~~ embarrassed. They didn't need to be. This is a good family; this is not a greedy family. They said to me, "We work so hard to instill values into our children." And I know they do; we all do. Once in a while an episode happens to remind us that our culture teaches other values, even as we teach ours.

Someone in the crowd stops Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. He asks Jesus to settle a will so that he can have his fair share. We learn something about Jesus' personality here. Some people would just charge right in to this situation and wrestle that problem to the floor. It should be an easy one: One brother is withholding part of the inheritance from the other brother. Fair is fair; you shouldn't need to be the incarnate God to figure this one out. But Jesus seems to be one of those people who says, "Mm, I'm not gettin' into the middle of this one. I'm not a judge; I never took the bar. This isn't my field." Jesus is not a lawyer, but he is a teacher, so he uses this experience to teach the man about the true desires of his heart. It looks like a simple call for fair play, but Jesus sees that what motivates the request is not fairness, but the desire for money, and that's where he nails this guy. He's got the wrong values.

Jesus does not say that money is evil, or that wealth is bad. Instead, he warns us that riches will lead to false values. We will become obsessed with ourselves and negligent of our brothers and sisters. Poverty is not a goal in the Christian life, but it does have this advantage: If you're part of a family that counts every dollar, you've probably made some careful decisions about where your values are. If you're living more comfortably, you can afford not to wonder about your values. They need not influence your spending. And of course where we spend our money tells us about our values.

Whether we are inheriting old money or starting out with our first communion paycheck, it pays to know ~~what values motivate our love for money~~. *what ~~the~~ money is our ~~the~~ goal.*  
*Is money our goal, or a means to our goals?*