

Sunday, October 10, 2021
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Mark 10: 17 – 31
Then Who Can Be Saved?
No Way!

Gracious God, help us to remember all the stories throughout the ages that tell us of your power, your love, and your mercy. We may not understand everything about your kingdom, because it is so far from anything we have experienced here. Guide us to hear your call through the many lessons and begin to live our lives in the ways that allow us to be more faithful followers. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations in all of our hearts and minds be always acceptable to you O God! Amen.

Have you ever just had one of those weeks when you pray to yourself: Oh God, I'm really trying to do the right thing! I've gone to work or attended the activities I'm a part of, I've gone to church, I've helped others when I saw a need, and I've been trying to say the right things and think the right thoughts and yet things just aren't going right. It's happened to all of us from time to time. One of my favorite children's books is "Alexander and the Terrible Horrible No Good Very Bad Day". In this book, as with any of us, there are sometimes days that don't go just as we had thought they would----even in Australia, as Alexander found out.

I'm afraid it must have been much like that for the man who approached Jesus in our gospel lesson today. Assuming that he had always done the right things in his daily living, I can just see the disappointment in his face when he learned that he must still do more – give it all away. Since he thought he'd been doing all the right things and yet it still wasn't enough, the man must have wondered, when who can really be saved. Jesus' answer to the man as well as each of us is this: Would we be willing to give it all up-----all these things we consider important in the world----give it up for Jesus, give it up for God? That's a really difficult question and if we had to, how would we answer and if we didn't answer appropriately, what would that mean?

Then who can be saved? It isn't just this man's or the disciples' question, it's also ours. If those who seem most blessed, most deserving by their works in everyday life are going to have a hard time entering the kingdom of God, then it's understandable that the disciples would ask, "then really----who can be saved?" It's important to listen closely to Jesus' words of answer, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God. For God, all things are possible." How do we even begin to truly understand these After Pentecost lessons? Just last week in our gospel lesson Jesus called us all children and all heirs of God's heavenly kingdom but now this week, we're told that it's nearly impossible to do so!

As I consider this lesson, Jesus needs to remind us that by our own merit, we will never be good enough to enter the kingdom. Only God, as Jesus says is truly good. For us, it's impossible to be good in the same way that God is good. Yet for God all things are possible. God knows how insecure we humans can be, and God sees our tendency to put our trust in our things rather than in God. Even though over and over in our scripture readings we're asked to serve the needs of others, today we're being told that God doesn't accept us strictly for what we've done because God doesn't want us to be led astray, trusting in our wealth, our accomplishments, power or fame, rather than trusting in God.

Growing up, I remember wanting to spend my money as soon as I got some, unlike my brother who was a saver. I really liked shoes and in-style clothing when I was younger. And my brother liked to count his money just for the sheer joy of taunting me with how much he had. He would loan me a few dollars from time to time but the interest rates were pretty high. Mom and Dad always said that my money was burning a hole in my pocket. As I look back perhaps my brother's love of money was as well. Money can certainly have a burning effect on one's pocket, but it is far more dangerous when things, money, power or fame burn into our hearts as we hear in today's lesson.

Jesus didn't tell the man in the story to immediately go and give away all that he had, but he asked the man if he would be **willing** to give up the false promise of the money and follow only the commandments completely. God calls us away from the false promises in the world as well. God calls us away from the false promises of our "things" by sharing among others. In doing so, we are restored to a deeper and more committed relationship with God.

It's funny how different things control our lives from time to time. When I was a little girl, I had a stuffed dog that controlled our whole family really. I wasn't too creative with names----but Doggie and I were inseparable. Most pictures from that time period included Doggie. He got so badly worn that grandmother had to make a new sock body for him. Funny though, it was only a few years and Doggie was no longer the control of my life but consigned to a box in Mom and Dad's basement and now in a tub in the attic. He was replaced over time by other "things" that I considered to be of great value in my life---things that I just couldn't possibly part with.

I tell this story not to say that stuffed animals or possessions are bad or that I was wrong to care about Doggie so much, but to remind us that it is so easy to become overly focused on our material things, unwilling to keep them in their proper space in our lives. If we find ourselves thinking that something we have or if we allow some activity to totally consume our time, then this gospel After Pentecost lesson is certainly for us – a needed refocusing reminder for our living.

Perhaps the real take-away from the lesson today is that our material things aren't and won't necessarily ever be bad. Instead, it's how we relate to these things that is the measure of how we are living in God's will and the hope of attaining eternal life. The

things that we love in life too much in life can easily become the tiny eyes of the needles that the camel is trying to go through.

So many of Jesus' teachings, as well as this one, remind us of the need to prioritize. As Christians, we all know and try to follow the basic commandment rules of not cheating or stealing or murdering and so on. Of course, Jesus calls us to follow the commandments of old, but to also attend to the behavior attitudes that are more challenging. We are asked to let go of the things that the world expects us to cherish, and put the love of God first and foremost in our lives. And second, Christians are called to love and care for others, both the lovable and the not-so-lovable. Faithful Christian living is an "all-in" challenge, not something we can only do halfway. Christians are reminded how really difficult it is to live with one leg in the world of our material things and one leg in the kingdom of God.

In the Old Testament section this morning, we find Job being worn down and wondering where God is during his continued and severe life trials. How easy it would have been for Job to just give in to all the tangible things that the devil could so easily satisfy him with over the faith that seemingly no one understands. How easy it is for anyone of us to give in to the temptations of the world and make them all important in our lives, especially when nothing is seemingly going well or if we feel that it's always us – doing and doing for others and now that doing seemingly isn't even enough.

The Epistle lesson from Hebrews said, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight." -----Who then really can be saved? The gospel Good News reminds us that we all have been saved. Thanks be to God! We need these After Pentecost

reminders about what being saved really means. The kingdom of God isn't just something way off in the future. The kingdom of God starts here and now all around us. It is a kingdom where those who are in need are honored precisely because of their need, and those who have much are honored and invited to discover their purpose and meaning by using what they have not just for themselves but also for the good of others. It's not just the money we might be rich in, but each of us are rich – very rich in gifts and talents that we don't always honor as a richness. Whatever wealth we individually have is to be shared freely among others. “Would you be willing to do so?” Jesus asks.

Most of us don't want to be called just a follower of the crowd or some trend or accused of being a copy-cat, however this is exactly what we must be as Christians. We must follow Christ who knows God and knows the desires of God for his beloved creation. As we consider our Christian living through the gospel lesson again today, we must look into our hearts and see what and where control lies—taking a hard look or inventory, Jesus implies. Then who can be saved? Christian followers are guided or nudged to take inventory of our wealth and determine where we can help the most with what we have in order to make the eye of the needle a bit easier to navigate. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.