

King of Glory Lutheran Church  
October 9/10, 2021  
Year B: 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 10:17-31  
Rev. Debra Abbott

**Mark 10:17-31**

*<sup>17</sup>As [Jesus] was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>18</sup>Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. <sup>19</sup>You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’ ” <sup>20</sup>He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” <sup>21</sup>Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” <sup>22</sup>When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.*

*<sup>23</sup>Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” <sup>24</sup>And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup>It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” <sup>26</sup>They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” <sup>27</sup>Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”*

*<sup>28</sup>Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” <sup>29</sup>Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, <sup>30</sup>who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. <sup>31</sup>But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”*

What is your inheritance?

Maybe you have inherited or expect to someday inherit money or property or an item that has special significance. Sometimes we inherit things that are a joy and a blessing, passed down from generation to generation.

Or maybe you have inherited things you would rather not have. Something more along the lines of debt, a broken relationship, a tragic history, even regret.

I've been thinking about the idea of inheritance this week because of the man we meet today in the gospel of Mark who comes to speak to Jesus. As the story unfolds it turns out that he has many possessions. He's a wealthy guy. In Mark's gospel he is simply described as a man. In the gospels of Matthew and Luke he is a young man or a ruler respectively.

In any case, whether he is a man or a rich young ruler, his story is important enough that it appears three times in the New Testament.

Imagine the scene that unfolds, a man runs up to Jesus, kneels before him and asks this question, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

What must I do to inherit eternal life?

It's an interesting question if you consider the meaning of inheritance. To inherit means that a person receives something from a family member upon their death. Land, money, material possessions etc. prescribed by a legal document or a family relationship. There isn't anything a person can do to inherit something. You inherit something when someone dies, not because you have done something to earn it.<sup>i</sup>

So right away this man presents an intriguing question to Jesus. What must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus answers him.

Jesus tells this man that he needs to follow the commandments. The man says, no problem, I have been doing that since I was a kid.

But Jesus isn't finished yet. *"Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions."*

Before Jesus says anything to this man he looks at him and he loves him.

That might be the most important thing that happens in this story.

Jesus looks at him and loves him. Then Jesus gives an answer that this man did not expect to hear.

To inherit eternal life on his own, this man must give all he has to people who have nothing. And then follow Jesus, minus his stuff.

The man walks away shocked and grieving. We can almost sense the pause as Jesus watches him walk away. *“Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were perplexed at these words.”*

In a time when people believed that wealth was a sign of God’s blessing, Jesus’ words were difficult to understand. If the most blessed people couldn’t save themselves, then what hope was there for everyone else?

*But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”*

That doesn’t just sound hard, it sounds impossible. Picture a needle and a camel. I know as a child I thought this might be some kind of puzzle or magic trick. But I don’t think Jesus was offering a puzzle for us to figure out. A camel isn’t meant to go through the eye of a needle.

The disciples couldn’t figure it out either. *They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”*

Wealth, money and possessions can lead us to believe that we can take care of ourselves. That we can get wherever we want to go because of what we have. And yet, if we are honest, we know that wealth doesn’t solve all our problems and that all we own can disappear overnight.

And it’s not only wealth that gives us confidence in ourselves and our future. We put a lot of hope in our own abilities and our own goodness. Maybe you are really smart, have a lot of experience, or are well connected. Maybe you try to always do the right thing, stay out of trouble and keep God’s commandments.

So what do you rely on to keep you safe and secure now and in the future?

The question Jesus puts before us today is not what we rely on but who we rely on.

Today Jesus looks right at you and me with love and invites us to recognize our need for the transforming power of God’s love and grace. Love and grace that have already been given to us, before we can even ask. Love and grace that come from God alone, not because of anything we have done to earn it.

Put yourself in the place of the man we meet today, if you were kneeling before Jesus and he looked at you, and loved you what would Jesus say to you? What step would he challenge you to take to truly experience the kingdom of God?

Because that's what Jesus is talking about today. The kingdom of God.

Jesus tells us that he is bringing about a new kingdom. And the work to bring about the kingdom is hard work, even painful work. It is not easy. Jesus tears down every expectation and every belief we have that we can build this kingdom ourselves or get there somehow on our own.

Professor Charles Campbell from Duke Divinity School poses this interesting thought. In Mark's gospel today we are confronted by extreme demands – sell all of your possessions, give the money to the poor, follow Jesus. Followed by extreme judgment - it is impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. And ultimately, extreme promises of love and grace.<sup>ii</sup>

God saves us through God's love and grace. That is the good news Jesus brings to us and to all people. Rich and poor, young and old, sick and healthy, wise and foolish, saint and sinner.

We cannot save ourselves, that is impossible. But for God all things are possible. And in response to this good news, this amazing gift, this extreme promise, we are called to follow where Jesus leads.

Today Jesus makes an extreme promise but not without an extreme demand. Follow me, live in community with other people, share what you have, be generous, be kind, be compassionate. Be a part of the kingdom of God.

Jesus teaches us that we have so much more than we can ever imagine when we live together, when we worship together, when we pray together, when we serve together, when we walk together. This is our inheritance as God's children, this is the kingdom of God, where everything is asked of us and everything is given in love and grace.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Campbell, Charles L. *Feasting on the Word*, Year B Volume 4. Mark 10:17-31, Homiletical Perspective pg. 165.

<sup>ii</sup> Campbell, Charles L. *Feasting on the Word*, Year B Volume 4. Mark 10:17-31, Homiletical Perspective pg. 167.