

**Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost – October 18, 2015**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

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**Mark 10:17-27**

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 18) "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone. 19) You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" 20) "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." 21) Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 22) At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. 23) Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" 24) The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25) 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." 26) The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" 27) Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Can you imagine what it must have like to walk along with Jesus on the dusty paths of Palestine? What miracle would come next? Who would be the next visitor seeking a private interview with Jesus? What amazing words would fall from his lips? What striking parable or illustration would he tell to silence his critics? Imagine yourselves on such a dusty path – parents had been bringing young children to Jesus seeking his blessing and the 12 had tried to turn them away. When word of their actions came to Jesus – he became indignant! He went out of his way to show his love for the little children – taking them in his arms and reminding all that the kingdom of God belongs to children.

One wonders if perhaps the 12 may have hung back a bit as Jesus got up to continue his journey. Perhaps that's what opened the path for the man in our text to come running up to Jesus and fall on his knees before him. The other gospel accounts describe this man as being young and as having great wealth. From this account we're likely describe this fellow as enthusiastic, energetic, polite and deeply religious. He's the kind of young man father's would love for their daughters to meet and marry. People loved him and he assumed that he deserved to be loved by God as well. In fact, he saw himself as having lived an exemplary life. And he was eager to continue down that path. That's why he came running to Jesus with his question: "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

He was convinced that he had the ability to gain eternal life by his own actions – and he was convinced that Jesus could tell him exactly what was necessary. As this conversation with Jesus unfolded, the disciples came back into earshot.

They heard Jesus give a warning about not going to extremes. It appears that the young man had at least one flaw – he overestimated himself. Later the disciples would display the opposite flaw – they underestimated God. Both of these flaws are in reality sins, which require the Lord's forgiveness. They are also sins to which we are prone; therefore, we need to hear our Lord's warnings about going to extremes:

**Theme:** Let's not go to extremes

1. Let's not overestimate ourselves
2. Let's not underestimate God

Let's pay close attention to the exchange which took place between Jesus and the rich young man: **"Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 18) "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone.** With his answer Jesus poses several challenges to the man. His question is intended to give the man an opportunity to think about what it really means to be good. Jesus says no one is good – except God alone. The man who had come running to Jesus needed to hear both of these thoughts and so do we. We need to hear the condemning reality of the Law that God alone is perfect and that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of the law. We need to hear that all of our righteous deeds are like filthy rags. We need to hear that the wages of sin is death. But we not only need to hear these things – we need to believe them to be true about ourselves. We need to avoid the extreme of thinking that somehow or other we are exempt from those words – that God isn't really talking about us when he says those things. It is only when we see in ourselves the extreme tendency toward pride, greed, and a host of our sinful attitudes that we will begin to appreciate Jesus for who he really is and for what he has done for us. God alone is good. God alone can provide the perfection he requires of us. With his words, No one is good – except God alone Jesus is directing the young man to look away from himself and to look to Jesus as God – the one who could provide what he was lacking and unable to provide for himself.

Jesus continues and directs the young man to some of the commandments which he and we know quite well: **19) You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'** Before Jesus could get any further he was interrupted -- **"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."** In his own mind he was not exaggerating, he wasn't boasting or bragging, he was just presenting the simple facts – I haven't killed anyone or had a sexual relationship outside of marriage, I've never stolen anything, I've never perjured myself or cheated anyone. I was a good boy and that's the way I still live my life. Outwardly, he was the model of a law-abiding citizen. Unfortunately, however, his understanding of the law was a bit limited – as is ours at times.

We're not above comparing ourselves to others and concluding that we're not all that bad. We're not above thinking that God owes us answers to our prayers because of what we have done for him. We're not above going to the extreme in overestimating ourselves and having a higher opinion of ourselves that God has of us. At times we get so caught up in looking at the way we live our lives that we forget to examine the attitudes of our hearts – attitudes of pride, greed, hatred, or selfishness.

**Jesus looked at him and loved him. And Jesus also loves us.** Jesus' next words reveal his love for us and for the man who stood before him. They are words that cut away the fine looking exterior and reveal the ugly interior of greed, selfishness, pride, and self-trust. **"One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."** Jesus knew where the man's heart was. He knew his love for money and the things it could buy. He knew that the man suffered from AFFLUENCA – his affluence, his riches – that's what was really most important to him.

You see, this man probably assumed that on the basis of his good behavior, he was all right with God. But Jesus loved him too much to allow him to think that way for long. Instead, Jesus cuts right to the heart of the matter. In fact, he cuts right to the man's heart-because that's where the this man's problem was. This man had a divided heart. It was divided between the desire to earn heaven and a desire to enjoy his wealth. Like a master surgeon, Jesus diagnosed this man's problem with a single statement. Jesus tells the man, *"One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven."*

Hmmm. Here was the ultimate test for this man. What was more important to him? His riches or his soul? Could he, would he give up everything he had on earth in order to gain a treasure in heaven? Well, you heard the man's answer. Mark told us that *"the man's face fell. (And) he went away sad, because he had great wealth."* He was appalled at what Jesus said!

Tell me, would your reaction have been any different than his? What if God said to you, "I want you to put all your possessions in a rummage sale, sell everything you own and give you money to the poor." Could you do that? Would you do that? I ask that question not because God demands that you give all your money to the poor, nor because God promises to give you eternal life if you do. No, I ask that question-God asks that question-as a way to help you and me diagnose our own hearts. Jesus question gives us a chance to ask ourselves, "What is more important to me? God or money? What do I cling to most tightly? What do I spend the most time thinking about? What do I work harder for? Which would hurt more to lose? Is there a part of me that winces at the thought sharing more of my money to help others with their spiritual or physical needs? Would I rather just keep it all for myself? Have I become the rich fool who said to himself, *"I'll build bigger barns to store my wealth"*? Have I stored up things for myself without being rich toward God?

I don't know about you, but as I think about the attitude of the man in our text, I realize that in many ways, he and I are the same. I am guilty of the same sin of idolatry, at times loving and trusting money more than God. And the reason for this may just stem from the fact that we've gone to the extreme of underestimating God and his love for us.

In our text, Jesus underscores what a spiritual stumbling block wealth is when he says, *"How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God."* In fact, *"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."* When Jesus' disciples heard Jesus say that, when they thought about what Jesus had demanded of that rich man, and more importantly, when they think about their own sin-filled hearts, they find themselves asking the obvious question, *"Who then can be saved?"* Jesus' answer is telling. *"With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."* In other words, God is the only one who can get a rich man into heaven. And, how does he do that? God will get the rich to heaven not by demanding a vow of poverty, or a larger gift to charity. God will get rich people to heaven the same way he gets anybody else to heaven. And that's by leading them and us to see that we are all idolaters by nature. We are all guilty of loving something more than God, be it money or possessions, or pleasure. God will get people to heaven by leading us to see that because of our sinfulness, we deserve nothing but hell. He leads us to see that our only hope has nothing to do with our goodness, but everything to do with his grace. He leads us to see that our only hope is to throw ourselves on his mercy and trust that because of Jesus' perfect life and sacrificial death, God has declared that we are not guilty in his eyes because Jesus has removed our guilt. In Jesus Christ alone, God gives us something that is truly precious. He gives us full forgiveness for our sins. He gives us the promise of life as a child of God now and forever in heaven. It's those priceless gifts which finally allow us to loosen our grip on the material things we're tempted to cling so tightly to.

In Christ, God has made each one of you somebody new. He's made you somebody who sees wealth not as something to be hoarded, but rather something to be managed and used for his glory. Through the eyes of faith, you and I can see that wealth doesn't have to be a trap. It is a blessing -- a way to provide for the physical and spiritual needs of our family, our community, our world, and ourselves. In fact, isn't that one of the reasons God gives us wealth, to give us a tangible way to show our gratitude to God for all of his gifts to us? Isn't that why we want to take the time this to thoughtfully plan our gifts to God? We don't want to give God what's left over after we've taken our cut. As an expression of who's #1 in our lives, we say, "God, I'm going to set aside this portion for you. In my head, I'm not quite sure how it's going to work out. But in my heart, I believe that you won't let me go hungry. I know that as long as you're in charge, I can be content.

God has lifted up his Son on a cross to cure us from the guilt, the power, and the punishment of loving money. And in so doing, God has freed us to truly live a life that is truly dedicated to God. May God so grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.