

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 20B (Proper 23B)
October 10, 2021
Mark 10:17-22

How to Inherit Eternal Life

And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." (Mark 10:21 ESV)

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

There was once a TV commercial for an investment firm that said, "We make money the old-fashioned way. We earn it." That idea that one had to earn something, or everything, once held sway in our country, and perhaps still does to an extent. But it was nothing new. In today's Gospel, we see it is quite ancient. The man asking Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?", thought he had to earn it and that he could. And once again we see what happens when one asks the wrong question. By God's grace, we hear the voice of our Savior and learn that eternal life is ours not because we earn it by keeping the commandments, and so trust in ourselves, but because Jesus calls us to give up everything and follow Him because He has done everything.

The man in our text ran up to Jesus and knelt before Him. Why? He thought Jesus to be a good teacher, though he really wasn't ready to learn what Jesus taught. He asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" But in asking what he must do, he's really asking a Law question and, so, is putting the whole burden of salvation on himself. He's seeking eternal life on his terms, thinking he has to earn it, and, in fact, that he can. So, when Jesus directs him to the commandments, the man says he's kept them since he was a child. But if that's the case, why is he still seeking something more? He seems to want the ultimate congratulation on an already exemplary life. And while Jesus' divine identity momentarily glimmers through the word "good," the young man is too intent upon his own merits to notice. Otherwise, before the Son of God in human flesh he would hardly dare to wave his own list of merits.

Today, many also view Jesus as the ultimate Source to affirm their lifestyle. They want Jesus to confirm they've made the right choices, no matter what they've been. Jesus is no more than someone from whom to get self-help advice, motivational guidance, or approval. He is good after all.

But Jesus doesn't congratulate the man on his achievement. He also doesn't blast the man for his misguided confidence. Instead, Jesus makes a surprising, earth-shattering demand of this young man. Jesus asks him to give up the most important thing in his life, the one thing he was not willing to sacrifice at that moment. Jesus' demand exposes the man's true diagnosis, the

death lurking within him. If the man thought he could earn salvation, then Jesus gives him Law he can't keep.

Now let's be clear: Jesus is not here commanding all Christians to sell all their possessions and give to the poor. Rather, Jesus is treating this man based on a specific message of Law geared directly to this man's need. The Law of God crashes into the darkest, most remote corners of our lives where we neither expect nor want God's reach. What's that for you? What are you unwilling to give up, or sacrifice, to follow Jesus?

The Old Testament Reading (Amos 5:6-7, 10-15) tells how nothing escapes God's attention. He knows our offenses in all their detail. He knows the evil lurking in our hearts and the death lurking within us. But we prefer a Jesus who affirms our respectability and morality in the community. Instead He confronts us whose gossip, grudges, and insufficient charity toward others actually harm the community. We prefer a Jesus who compliments our faithfulness in our home and family. Instead, He confronts us whose secret thoughts and acts are often too sinful and shameful to be exposed. We prefer a Jesus who blindly gives us the necessities of life. Instead, He confronts us who so often forget to thank the Lord for His good gifts (v 22).

Jesus slices with the cutting edge of the Law to prepare for the healing Gospel. He wants to act finally as Savior, not a guru for this man and for us. That's why Mark notes that Jesus looked at this man intently, this man comfortable with his own misguided works-righteousness, and still Jesus loved him.

And Jesus loves you too. Do you think eternal life comes through the Law? Do you think of eternal life at all? Do you think you can earn eternal life by your works, by your keeping the commandments? Do you think you're good enough to deserve eternal life? Repent! You're no more able to keep the Law well enough to merit eternal life than that man was able to sell everything he had. After all, an inheritance is a gift. So, if you're going to inherit eternal life, Someone else has to earn it for you. In fact, to inherit anything, including eternal life, Someone else has to die.

And Someone has done just that. The One the man called "good" took the burden of the Law upon Himself, knowing that the demands of the Law are way beyond our ability to keep them. He kept all of them perfectly in our place. In the call to follow Him, Jesus tells the man, and us, that eternal life is found not in our efforts, not in what we do, but it is found only in Him as a gift. We don't receive eternal life through the Law, but only through the Gospel.

You see, at the time of this text, Jesus is on His way to the cross. He's already predicted His death two times and is now about to predict it a third time. In the cross, we see and understand the severity of our sin and at the same time the superabundant mercy of God. For while the rich man could not give up everything, Jesus did. He even gave His life for us, even to the point of death on the cross. He bore our sins and suffered what we deserve. He died so that we might inherit eternal life.

And today, Jesus lavishly loves us and comes to us in His Gospel and the Sacraments to remove the burden of the Law from us and grant us His loving forgiveness. As we are led to Confession and Absolution and to receive His holy body and blood in the Lord's Supper, Jesus' grace overflows to us. Through the means of grace, Jesus joins us to His sacrificial death and His victorious life. He gives us eternal life as a gift of His grace. To follow Him is to receive this grace, this mercy, this forgiveness, this life, by faith, which is also His gift to you. To follow Jesus is to trust in Him and all that He has done for you.

The rich, young man was seeking eternal life and thought he could earn it by the Law. But to this point, he wasn't sure he had done enough. So He sought Jesus for advice on what he needed to do to be sure. But Jesus exposes the depth of the sin, the cancerous death within him. He exposes the man's unbelief and idolatry. Then He lovingly invites the man to receive the eternal life he sought – which is following Jesus. For the Son of Man has sacrificed everything, since we and the young man cannot. Jesus gives Himself for you and to you that you may believe in Him, follow Him, and receive the eternal life He gives. God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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