

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 21B (Proper 24B)
October 17, 2021
Mark 10:23-31

Who Can Be Saved?

Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." 29 Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first." (Mark 10:28-31 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

Remember the man in last week's Gospel? You know, the man who asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The man Jesus told, "Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." The one who "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." (Mark 10:21-22). Today we get the rest of the story.

Now, if we didn't already know, being Jesus' disciple is hard. It's hard because it requires that we give up any ideas of earning God's favor. It demands that we "fear, love, and trust in God above all things." That we not misuse His holy name, but "call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks." That we not "despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it." It demands that we give up all trust in ourselves, our possessions, our desires or feelings, and our own worthiness or merits. And this goes against everything we hold dear. For we desperately want to think that somehow, in at least some measure, we deserve, or can earn, or somehow merit, God's favor and eternal life, if that's even important to us at all.

But Jesus leaves no wiggle room for those wanting eternal life. For those who think that wealth or possessions are a sign of God's favor, as many do even in our day, Jesus declares, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." Oh, how hard that is! And while various explanations have been put forth to explain this, it is clear to all that a camel, a large beast, can hardly squeeze through a small opening like the eye of a needle, no matter what that is.

But why is it so hard for a rich person to be saved? It's because the temptation is overwhelming to love and trust in the riches rather than in God. The devil, the world, and our own sinful selves lead us to think that we have earned or deserve the riches rather than receive them as gifts from God to be used for His purposes. Too often, the riches themselves become a hindrance to believing in Christ and following Him for they become the primary interest in our lives, even more important than Christ or eternal life itself.

Yet, the disciples seemed to understand the gravity of Jesus' words. "Then who can be saved?" they ask. Indeed, that is the question. To which Jesus answers, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." Truly, salvation and eternal life is impossible for man. No one can save himself no matter how hard he may try. He needs the salvation which only God can give, and that salvation comes only through Jesus. If we are to be saved, if we are to attain eternal life, it will happen only because God does it.

And then, when Peter declares that he and the other disciples had left everything and followed Jesus, Jesus says, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life." It sounds so wonderful, doesn't it? It sounds like a great life now and eternal life later. But did you hear all that Jesus said? Along with "houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands," He includes, "with persecutions." That's also what makes it hard to be Jesus' disciple. Who wants to hear of being persecuted, much less experience it? And yet, the disciples did. They had given up everything and followed Jesus. And, as they preached repentance and faith in Christ, they were persecuted, even as Jesus had been.

So what about us? We who all are rich beyond measure, even in material goods, would have a very difficult time giving it all up in order to follow Jesus. We are too attached to our stuff. After all, the world tells us to go for the gusto, win at all costs, only winning matters. It's either be number one, or nothing. If we can't be first, we're as good as last. And no one wants to be last. So, what do we do?

Jesus shows and tells us a different way. For He who is first, who was before the world was created, became last. He who is rich became poor, that through His poverty we might become rich. He left His wealth behind to be born of a virgin, wrapped in swaddling cloths, and laid in a manger. He suffered opposition from the devil and the religious leaders of the day. He was persecuted, whipped, ridiculed, and crucified. He bled and died on that holy cross, offering Himself as the divine sacrifice for sin. He went through "the eye of a needle," through death and the grave, but death could not hold Him, and He rose on the third day. He lives and reigns to fulfill the promises He's given you. That's why salvation is possible only for God. Only He could do and has done all that is necessary to atone for the sins of the world and grant forgiveness and life.

And that's not only for the future. It's for right now, in this time. For God has kept His promise that "there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life." You see, when you became a Christian, when you were made a child of God in Baptism, you, in effect, left everything to follow Jesus. No, you didn't lose your family, but you now do not love them as much as you love your God. For if you did love these

people more than you love God, you would be an idolater and no longer be a Christian. But your idolatry ended when Jesus baptized you, thus making Himself your God. That is what you received in your Baptism, along with forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, you received a God whom you can love more than any other.

Likewise, you have come into God's family, the Church. And it's a great big family, spread all around the world. It's a caring family, where brothers and sisters love one another and look after the needs of those who are hurting. We readily share our wealth when we see a brother in need. So you've got houses and family literally all around the world, places to stay, people who will help you out – and, conversely, people whom you will help when you see them in need. That's how it works in the Church.

That means you are not alone, so you don't hide your needs or suffer as though you were alone. Look around and see the family who loves you and who will go to great lengths to care for you in your need. And should you suffer persecution or rejection on account of Christ, not everyone will turn their back to you or harm you. God assured the lonely Elijah that there were still 7,000 faithful saints in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). Paul writes, "So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace" (Romans 11:5).

Yes, your God is exceedingly great in His gifts, and superabundant in the way that He provides and cares for you. Not only does He speak to you the forgiveness of your sins; not only has He adopted you to be His child; not only does He feed and nourish you with the meal of eternal life; not only does He give His Church pastors and teachers who treat you with a shepherd's care; but your gracious God has also given you each other.

And all these God gives you in great abundance – now in this time. And in the life to come it will all increase as you join the countless multitude "clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10).

In that day the first will be last as those who trust in themselves, those who love family and possessions more than they love God, will be last as they are left outside the Kingdom of God. And those who are last, those who by God's grace alone left everything to follow Jesus will be first as they rejoice forever in the presence of their Savior. Then you will know true riches beyond measure, "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you." (1 Pet. 1:4). Amen.

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

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