

21st Sunday after Pentecost
October 13, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Mark 10:17-27 (EHV)

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, one man ran up to him and knelt in front of him. He asked, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”¹⁸ Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except one—God.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 The man replied, “Teacher, I have kept all these since I was a child.”

²¹Jesus looked at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”²² When he heard this, he looked sad and went away grieving, because he had great wealth.²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!”

²⁴The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus told them again, “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in their riches to enter the kingdom of God!²⁵ 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.”

²⁶They were even more astonished and said to one another, “Who then can be saved?”²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “For people, it is impossible, but not for God, because all things are possible for God.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

There have been and continue to be lots of home renovation shows on television. Let's imagine that we are going to renovate an old house. We put on new siding, replace the windows, and put on a new roof. We redo the landscaping and the deck. Soon the outside of the house is looking wonderful. We tackle the inside as well. New carpet, new cabinets, marble countertops and new appliances. We renovate the bathrooms, take out some walls to make big bedrooms, closets and open spaces. Everything looks great on the inside and outside of the house.

However, we decided not to fix the foundation problems. The mold was just hidden better. The termite infested structural wood was ignored. Well, pretty soon, the really nice-looking renovations are going to crack and sag and fall apart because the structure under them and inside of them is bad. We had the wrong priorities in fixing up that old house. We wanted to make it look good instead of actually being good.

This is a human condition as well. Although the man in our text seemed to have everything together in life, Jesus shows that his priorities were not right. As we follow Christ, we allow Christ to set proper priorities for us.

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This man showed respect to Jesus, even humility before Jesus by kneeling before him. This rich man was not a stereotypical rich man who thinks the poor are beneath him. Many in his community would have really liked this man. Yes, he had great wealth, but he was one of the good ones. He did not use his wealth to oppress people, to steal from others, to harm others, to

take the wife of other men, or to defraud. This man took God's commandments seriously. He honestly tried to follow all of them since he was a child. Parents would have pointed to this man as a good example of a godly man for their boys to imitate. He is a good man in the eyes of people. Some would even look at his wealth as evidence that God was pleased with him. He kept the commandments of God and God blessed him with material wealth.

It is interesting that Jesus does not challenge him on his claim, "Teacher, I have kept all these since I was a child." In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pointed out that the thoughts and desires of our heart are sin even if we don't carry out the sinful action. Hate is the same as murder, lust the same as adultery, greed the same as theft. This man had certainly broken every commandment in his thoughts as well as in his deeds. Jesus knew every sinful thought and action of this man from his childhood but does not expose this man's delusion that he had kept all the commandments since he was a child. It is good for us to realize that Jesus could list out all of our sins of thought, word and action that go against God's commands too. We cannot claim to have kept any of the Commandments perfectly.

Jesus gets this man and us to see the proper priorities God wants for us to have. He passes by many of the Commandments and focuses this man's attention on the First Commandment.

²¹Jesus looked at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²²When he heard this, he looked sad and went away grieving, because he had great wealth.

This good man in the eyes of the world had his priorities out of order. If you had asked the man whether his wealth was more important than God, he would have likely said that God is most important in life. But Jesus shows him that he valued his wealth more than God. He trusted his wealth more than he trusted Jesus. Wealth was his god and the Lord God Almighty was second in line.

We would all say that Christ is the first priority in our lives. That is true in our new self, created by the Holy Spirit when we were brought to faith in Christ. But our sinful nature battles against this proper priority. How do we know when we have priorities that push Jesus out of first place? Perhaps we can ask ourselves: How would I react if I lose it? How would I react if I lost all my money? What would I think about Jesus if my health goes downhill fast? Would I keep following Jesus if my house was destroyed in a hurricane? Would I follow Jesus if a loved one is taken from me by death? Do I truly fear, love and trust in God above all things? Or do I fear, love and trust in God as long as I also have something else in life that I want? Would we walk away sad and grieving if Jesus challenged us in this way?

²³Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus told them again, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in their riches to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Jesus makes sure his disciples, who have left everything to follow him, understand the proper priorities for someone in the kingdom of God. Wealth is a danger. Trust in wealth makes it impossible to follow Jesus. You will never squeeze a camel through the eye of a needle. The disciples understand. Even if they have little in the way of riches, they understand that this also applies to them. Whether you have riches or are in debt, this also applies to you. If you are depending on the stuff and people of this world to save you, if you trust something or someone more than the Lord, it is impossible to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples ask what we should all ask.

²⁶They were even more astonished and said to one another, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, "For people, it is impossible, but not for God, because all things are

possible for God.”

Jesus does not leave them in suspense for the answer. He is the answer. God can do the impossible and save those who have mixed up priorities. Look back to see what Jesus did when the rich man told him that he had kept all the commandments since he was a child. *“²¹Jesus looked at him, loved him.”* Jesus loved this man who loved his money more than he loved Jesus. Jesus loved this man who would not give away his worldly possessions to follow Jesus. Jesus loved this man who looked great on the outside, who had it all together, who was a model god fearing man, who secretly was worshiping himself and his wealth.

Dear followers of Christ, Jesus loves you. He loves you when you feel like an imposter, when you’ve got everything thinking your life is together and it isn’t. Jesus loves you when you trust in wealth instead of him, when you build your life on lies and deception, when you think you don’t need him. Jesus loved the rich man who walked away from him, and he loves you. Was the rich man brought into the kingdom of God when he heard that Jesus died on a Roman cross and rose from the dead on the third day? Wouldn’t that be wonderful! For us, we know that even before we took our first breath, Jesus breathed his last from the cross to pay for our sins against the First Commandment and every other. Before we took our first breath, Jesus began to breath again in the tomb, keeping his promise to defeat death and the devil, to forgive all sin and bring us to eternal life. Jesus did the impossible to save you.

How do you know that he did this for you? Naaman was washed clean of leprosy in the Jordan River, and you were washed clean of sin by water and the Word in Holy Baptism. God did the impossible. He washed sin away. He converted you and I from trusting ourselves to trusting in Christ alone. He delivers his loving forgiveness to you in the absolution, in his Word, and in Holy Communion. He doesn’t just tell you that he loves and forgives you. He attaches his promises to water, to bread and wine, that we can see, and touch and taste. Christ has done the impossible. He saved you and me.

So instead of building a nice-looking house with a crumbling foundation and termite infested framing, we build our life on Christ. Paul tells us in Ephesians (2:20) “You have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the Cornerstone.” A life built on Christ and his Word has the proper priorities. Then wealth is used to serve according to Christ’s priorities. Health is used to serve our Savior and others. Relationships with family, friends, and neighbors are opportunities to serve Christ and others. Whether our life looks good or not so good to those around us, it is built upon the solid rock of Christ. He will not fail us, forget us or forsake us. He has done the impossible and we will inherit eternal life through Christ our Savior.

Amen.