

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost/October 14, 2018
Mark 10:17-22/Treasures of Heaven
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“...and you will have treasure in heaven;”

Today's Gospel is about a man who came to Jesus for advice. He wanted something very good; eternal life. He thought he knew how to get it, but he wanted some assurance, some sign he was on the right path. From all outward appearances, this man seemed to be an example of righteous living, but something was still nagging at him. Something about eternal life still left him uneasy. He wanted Jesus to tell him what was missing.

A quick glance of the Gospel might lead us to believe the problem was to do with the poor. On the surface, he didn't want to use his riches for the benefit of the poor. As we study today's Gospel, we learn this man's reluctance to help the poor is really a symptom of a much deeper problem.

The problem already shows itself in the first verse when this man came to Jesus and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Well, this seems like a valid question, but deeper study turns up a problem. Do you see the issue?

The problem is using the words “I do” with the word “inherit.” You do not inherit because of what you do. You inherit because of what someone else did. You inherit because someone else included you in their will. The heir of a will might be a child, a grandchild, a niece or nephew, or even a dog or cat. The point is the heirs really have no say. The person who makes the will determines who inherits.

The problem was he thought that if he dotted all the i's and crossed

all the t's, he could force God to love him enough to put him in the heavenly will. This man felt he did everything he was supposed to do, but he still felt uncertain. He wanted Jesus to assure him either he had done enough or tell him what else he needed to guarantee eternal life. Like many people, this man thought he just needed some special knowledge or to do some special task. If he could just learn the secret, he could guarantee his place in eternity.

This is the seduction of all false religions. They teach good works will eventually lead a person to salvation. They all try to answer the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Many of these systems espouse lives of great moral behavior to answer this question, but they all fail to answer the next question. What should I do when I fail? What does a Jew do when he fails to keep the laws of Moses? What does a Moslem do when he fails to observe the Five Pillars of Islam? What does the member of the secret society do when he can't maintain purity of life and conduct so essentially necessary for gaining admission into the celestial lodge? These religions are so eager to give us control over our own destiny all fail to mention what happens when we fail.

Since the man's question was based on the law, Jesus gave an answer also based on the law. Jesus began by saying, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." With these words, Jesus wants us to really think about what the word "good" means. In the true sense, "good" only applies to God. God is the only source of "good" in our lives.

After Jesus jolted this man into thinking about the true meaning of the word "good," He went on to tell him to examine his life in terms of the Commandments: "You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" We

commonly call this the second table of the law. It deals with loving your neighbor as yourself.

When we properly understand the full meaning of these commands, the proper response is to realize we have broken them all. When we understand the Bible considers hatred to be a form of murder, we must admit we are all murderers. When we realize even the smallest lustful thought about someone who is not our spouse amounts to adultery, we must admit we are all adulterers. The least bit of laziness makes us into thieves. Even if all we do is listen to gossip, we are liars. The number of ways we can break these commands is limited only by our creativity. As God Himself said, [Genesis 8:21] “The intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”

The man in today’s Gospel did not understand. When he heard Jesus’ response, he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” The context of this passage leads us to believe this man truly believed these words. Jesus piled up a collection of commands that should have had this man begging for mercy. Instead, he actually thought he had kept them all.

It is at this point in the conversation Jesus pointed out the man’s true failure. [Jesus] 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.” With these words, Jesus revealed the man’s heart. He did not fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Instead, his fear, love, and trust were based on his money. In spite of all his good works, this young man had gold for a god.

Who or what do we fear, love, or trust above all things? There are many false gods that want to rule our hearts. For example, security, comfort, reputation, family, friends, popularity, greed, power, pleasure, lust, and pride. These and many other concerns take our

eyes from Jesus Christ. At one time or another, we all suffer from the rule of these false gods in our hearts. We, like the young ruler, do not always fear, love, and trust in God above all things. We too are guilty of idolatry.

Our Gospel tells us Jesus loved this man with *αγάπη* love. Jesus told him what he needed to hear, not what he wanted to hear. This man needed to learn the hopelessness of his situation. He needed to understand he needed a savior outside of himself. That is how Jesus showed His *αγάπη*, love, to this man, even if it meant he would walk away sorrowful.

Jesus loves us the same way. He sends the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sin. The Holy Spirit comes to us through God's Word and shines the searing light of the law into our hearts. He shows us our true nature. He takes us to the depths of pure terror as He shows the future we earned. He shows us the true hopelessness of our good works.

It is at the lowest point the Holy Spirit brings the soothing message of the Gospel into our lives. When we realize there is no hope for us in ourselves, the Holy Spirit shows us the hope that is in Christ Jesus. He shows us how God entered history in the person of the man Christ Jesus. He reveals Christ as the one who kept the law perfectly in our place. Through the God's Word, the Holy Spirit takes us to the cross to show us how Jesus suffered and died in our place as the target of God's wrath. The Holy Spirit informs us Jesus did not remain buried in the tomb of death, but rose victorious over sin, death, and the power of the devil. Finally, the Holy Spirit gives us the faith that trusts Christ alone for salvation.

Through faith we constantly receive the forgiveness of our sins, God declares us holy in his eyes, and we inherit eternal life. We stop

asking the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Instead, the Holy Spirit uses us to point to Jesus and declare “Look what God has done to give me eternal life.”

We will not know what happened to the man in today’s Gospel until we arrive in Heaven. The Bible does not tell us if he came back later or if he rejected the work of the Holy Spirit completely.

What we do know is that we, like him, have an empty place inside of us. We hunger for the assurance about eternal life. If we try to find assurance on our own, we will fail. Only the Holy Spirit can fill the empty space inside of us. Only the Holy Spirit can give us the faith that receives the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation Jesus earned for us on the cross. He does this by convicting us of our sin with the Law and then comforting us with the good news of the Gospel. In this way, the Holy Spirit makes us children of God and heirs of eternal life.

When the time comes for you to leave this life, you will inherit eternal life, the treasure of heaven, as a member of the Church Triumphant. There, in heaven, you shall leave your sins behind and live under Jesus in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.