

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost/October 21, 2018
Mark 10:23-31/Passing Through
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“...and in the age to come eternal life”

I wonder what the rest of the world must think of us when they watch TV. What do they think of a woman who can't decide what to wear while their entire wardrobe consists of the clothes on their back? What do they think of people trying to decide where to lunch while they wonder if they will eat soon? Even the poorest of the poor in the United States would be judged wealthy by citizens in many other nations of the world. That is why the words of Jesus in today's Gospel should terrify every American. Jesus said, “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.”

Jesus words are even more startling when we study the role of wealthy people in first century Israel. There is a special reverence most westerners have for people who take a voluntary vow of poverty to serve others. We admire the doctor who gives up the wealthy practice in order to minister to the poor in the inner city. We admire the person who leaves a good job here in order to feed the poor in some third world country. We have heard the words of Jesus concerning wealth so often we have this idea the poor have a special place in God's heart. This was not so in first century Israel.

While Biblical culture certainly frowned on people who amassed wealth illegally, those who achieved wealth through diligence and hard work were considered to be the favored of God. They had the idea that honored places in heaven were reserved for people who obtained wealth in legal ways and used it to support the church and the community. The disciples would have thought the honest rich are

the most likely to enter heaven for they are the favored ones of God.

Thus, the teachings of Jesus comparing the poor and the wealthy were startling for people in those days. Jesus must have given the disciples a headache when He pointed to the widow's mite and said, [Mark 12:41-44] "And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

We can see the confusion of the disciples in their response to Jesus. They said to him, "Then who can be saved?" If the odds of the rich are the same as the odds of a camel, then who can get into the Kingdom of God? If the honest rich can't get in, then none of us have a chance.

None of us have a chance. That is the message of the law in today's Gospel reading. The teaching in today's Gospel is not it is bad to be rich, but no one is able to enter the Kingdom of God with their own resources. When Jesus said the most respected members of the culture could not earn their way into God's Kingdom, He was saying none of us rich or poor can earn a place in God's Kingdom. All of us are as likely to enter God's Kingdom as a camel is likely to pass through the eye of a needle.

The Holy Spirit inspired David to write, [Ps 51:5] "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." The Apostle Paul wrote, [Rom 5:12] "Death spread to all men because all sinned." Saint Paul listed a few of those sins in Galatians

and then concluded, [Gal 5:21] “I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” All of these verses reveal our sinful nature. We are sinners from conception and the only thing that happens as we grow and mature is our sins get more imaginative and destructive. With man it is truly impossible to inherit the Kingdom of God.

While it may be impossible with man, it is possible with God. [Jesus] said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” God is almighty, and He loves us dearly. He loves us so much the Apostle John wrote, [John 3:16-17] “...that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” We do not have the resources to enter the Kingdom of God, but the Kingdom of God has what it takes for enter us. We do not pray for us to come to God’s Kingdom. Instead we pray, in the very prayer our Lord Jesus taught us to say to our Father in Heaven, “Thy Kingdom come.”

The Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God. It comes to us in the God-man, Christ Jesus. In Jesus Christ, God took on a human nature and humbled Himself to live with us under the law. In His humility, He kept the law for us. He even humbled Himself to death on the cross. His death, the death of a perfect, holy, and innocent man, did for us what it is impossible for us to do for ourselves. He made it possible for the Kingdom of God to be in us and for us to be in the Kingdom of God.

The Holy Spirit provides the finishing touches for God’s work in us. He makes the impossible, possible. The Holy Spirit gives us God’s Word. The Holy Spirit gives us that Word in many ways. We read it ourselves in our private time with God. We share it among ourselves

as we meet with our brothers and sisters in Christ to learn and study it. We hear it read in the Divine Service and we also taste it as Christ gives us His true Body and Blood in with and under the bread and wine of the Holy meal. The Holy Spirit generously uses all these ways to feed your spirit with God's Word. Through that Word, He creates and sustains faith in you. He gives you the faith that believes the suffering and death of Jesus Christ takes away all your sins. That is when you live under the reign and rule of God. Therefore, it is through faith alone the camel passes through the needle's eye; that is, the rich and the poor alike enter the Kingdom of God, including you. Deo Gratis! Thanks be to God!