

Pentecost 20-October 10, 2021

Baltic and East Nidaros Parish

Mark 10:17-31

“Good Questions, Great Answers”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

The man who had many possessions asked Jesus a good question and then disciples after listening to Jesus asked another important question. First the man asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” and then the disciples asked, “Then who can be saved?” These may be questions that you still want answered. “How are you saved?” and “Who will be saved?” In one of my first years teaching confirmation classes, a confirmation student ended our class period by raising the question which combined both questions by asking “How am I saved?” I gave a terrible response. Since our time was up, I said it was really a good question and we would talk about it next week. Thankfully the student returned the following week, and the focus of the whole lesson was salvation, and the question was answered.

*Jesus wasn’t in much of a hurry to deliver an answer to the man who apparently was in a hurry to get an answer to this important question. We are told that this man **ran** up to Jesus and as soon as he got in front of Jesus, he knelt before Jesus and asked his burning question about eternal life. The unnamed man isn’t identified as having many possessions when Jesus first met him. That is revealed later to us. But Jesus always knows what is in the heart of whoever he encounters.*

*This man however revealed something about himself that troubled Jesus in the first word that came from his mouth. “Good”. You would think that Jesus would have commended this man for recognizing Jesus’ goodness by addressing him as “Good Teacher”, but this is the first issue that Jesus takes up with this man. Jesus to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.” Hearing Jesus say that “**no one** is good must hit this man hard. Or how does it sound to you to hear Jesus include you in this group of no-good doers? Jesus pushes this conversation about goodness by telling this man that he must then know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; and Honor your father and mother.’*

The man must have thought that there must be some goodness that mattered since he responded as he did. He told Jesus that he had kept all those commandments and he had done so for many years. This is when Mark records that Jesus looks at the man and loves him. Jesus, however, shows his love to this self-declared good man in a peculiar way. Jesus doesn’t say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” He doesn’t give the man a high 5 for his years of good work. He doesn’t ask the man to highlight some specific instances when he kept each of these commandments. Instead, Jesus shows his love to this man by asking him to do the one thing that was lacking. He told the man to sell what he owned and give the money to the poor. Then he could follow Jesus into eternal life.

This man could very well have done well in keeping the commandments on the second table which are those that deal with how well we treat our neighbors. But Jesus knew that this man loved his many possessions more than God. He was willing to give a few of them away to help his neighbors, but when Jesus asked him to give them all away and trust the Lord to provide for his needs, he didn’t run home to do as Jesus had asked him. He went away grieving. We never hear from this man again which leaves us wondering if he did what Jesus commanded him to do or worse yet, wondering if this man who Jesus looked at with love was saved.

After this man exited from the scene, Jesus turned his attention toward his disciples and continued his teaching on salvation. He tells the disciples how hard it will be for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven by using the familiar example of it being just as hard for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle. The disciples were probably still thinking about the rich man who at least kept the second tablet of commandments which has more commandments to keep than the first table which only has three commandments. They must have wondered, "Couldn't at least this good man be fit for the kingdom of God?" Then the disciples said, just what Jesus wanted them to say. "Then who will be saved?" Jesus now looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for all things are possible."

That's when Peter had a brainstorm. He thought if it is hard for the rich to inherit eternal life, then since the disciples have done just what Jesus told the rich man to go and do, they shouldn't have to squeeze through the gates of heaven. The gates should be open wide and there should be a party ready to welcome them in. Peter told Jesus how they left their families to follow Jesus. When Jesus said, "Follow me", they dropped their fishing nets and even left their father to figure out how to row back to shore. When Jesus said, "Take nothing with you", that's exactly what they did. They no longer had anything to sell. They had done what Jesus had told the rich man to do.

Peter and the disciples weren't told by Jesus that they lacked one thing like the rich man, but the disciples had forgotten one thing. They weren't able to outspend Jesus' continuous outpouring of blessings. And Jesus wasn't just talking about heavenly blessings in the age to come. Jesus told the disciples that they were going to receive a hundredfold NOW IN THIS AGE. They may have left their homes, but Jesus provided them with many homes to stay in. They may have left their families, but they were surrounded by far more families than they left behind. The disciples had forgotten the generous nature of God in spite of what they thought was living in poverty.

I will not leave you wondering the answers to the good question asked by the rich man, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" and the disciples' good question, "Then who can be saved?" like I did the confirmation student or as Jesus is still leaving the disciples wondering. Their question of "Then who can be saved?" becomes even more of a good question after listening to Jesus.

In the gospel reading from last week, Jesus taught that a lawful divorce or a happy marriage or remaining single has nothing to do with inheriting eternal life. And now this week, Jesus says that it is harder for those with wealth to enter the kingdom of God, but also adds that his own disciples won't enter the kingdom of God because of their poverty.

Jesus' great answer is that nothing is impossible with God. You can't do anything to inherit eternal life. Inheritances are gifts given to you and you have received yours already in the promise given to you in your baptism. Jesus does name you as "good" people in your baptism. Jesus calls you children who He will never let go, good or bad or everywhere in between. You can't outspend the blessings that Jesus will bestow to you. Jesus reminds you that, yes there will be persecutions in this age, but even those you will not face alone. The greatest part of your inheritance is that it is not something you must wait for until you die. Your inheritance has already been given to you because Jesus has already died for you. And yes, that is just the beginning. The blessings are for this age and in the age to come. This is the great answer from you Heavenly Father who alone is good to you. Amen