

GOD MUST DO ALL THE WORK
Sermon for the 21st Sunday after Pentecost, 2021
Mark 10:23-31

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Mark 10:23-31: ²³ **Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it will be for those who are rich to enter the kingdom of God!”**

²⁴ **The disciples were amazed at His Words. However, Jesus told them again, “Children, how hard it is 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 person to enter the kingdom of God.”**

²⁶ **They were extremely amazed. They asked one another, “Who then can be saved?”**

²⁷ **Jesus looked straight at them and said: “With men it is impossible but not with God. For with God all things are possible.”**

²⁸ **Then Peter began to say to Him: “Look! We have left everything and followed You.”**

²⁹ **Jesus said, “Truly, I tell you, there is no one who has left his house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for My sake and for the sake of the Gospel, ³⁰ who will fail to receive a hundred times as much, now, in this time, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields, with persecutions and, in the coming age, eternal life. ³¹ However, many who are first will be last, and the last first.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Last Sunday, we heard of an encounter that Jesus had with a man who *“came running to Him and fell on his knees before Him. He asked Him, “Good Teacher, what am I to do to inherit eternal life?”* (Mark 10:17). Jesus used this question to teach this man and us that there is nothing that anyone can do to earn eternal life for himself. If we are to have eternal life, then God is the one who must act.

Jesus specifically showed the man that he loved his stuff more than he loved God. Jesus told him, *“You lack one thing, Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor! You will have treasure in heaven. Then come here and follow Me!”* ²² *He looked gloomy when he heard that and went away sad, because he had great wealth”* (Mark 10:21-22). Jesus gave the man a lot to think about. He had to come to grips with his sin of idolatry and his need for forgiveness from Jesus. Did this man ever return to follow Jesus? We don't know.

Our Gospel for today continues from this account. As the man went away sad, **“Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it will be for those who are rich to enter the kingdom of God!”**

Jesus said something that seemed pretty reasonable to us, but the disciples were **extremely amazed** at His words. Why did these words seem so unusual to the disciples when they don't seem all that unusual to us?

This is where we need to remember the most important thing about interpreting God's Word, and that is *context*. When we read and study God's Word, it is necessary to understand the context of each passage to determine its meaning and application.¹ In order to understand the words of Jesus to His disciples and to us, we need to review the cultural context of first-century Israel.

Our culture today in the twenty-first century does not have the respect for wealth that was common when Jesus once walked this earth. Quite often, it is the complete opposite. Many people like to look down on wealth. The first instinct of many people in our culture is to assume that wealthy people are somehow unethical, cruel, heartless, unfeeling, and so on. This was not the case in first-century Israel.

Back then, the average citizen looked up to the wealthy - as long as a person came by wealth honestly, whether it be by hard work, good fortune, inheritance, and so forth. Wealthy people were considered to be especially blessed by God. Ordinarily, people assumed that honest wealth on earth indicated an equivalent treasure in heaven. People believed that the wealthy would be at the front of the line when it came time to enter the kingdom of God. So when Jesus said, **“How hard it will be for those who are rich to enter the kingdom of God!”** everyone who heard Him would think, “Well, if the wealthy have a hard time, then the rest of us don't have a chance!” That is the reason why the disciples **“were extremely amazed.”**

¹ See the AELC Statement of Faith, *The Source of our Faith, Holy Scripture, Principles in Expounding the Scriptures*, page 4

Jesus then reinforced His teaching with the camel through the eye of the needle metaphor. **“Jesus told them again, “Children, how hard it is 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 person to enter the kingdom of God.”**

²⁶ **They were extremely amazed. They asked one another, “Who then can be saved?”**

Remember now, that culture thought that it was easier for rich people to enter the kingdom of God than for poor people. So, if the impossibility of a rich person entering the kingdom of God was greater than the impossibility of a camel passing through the eye of a needle, then Jesus was basically saying that no one had a chance.

When the disciples asked the question, **“Who then can be saved?”** the obvious answer was that nobody could do this. No one, not the rich, not the poor, no one could enter the kingdom of God. That is the message of the Law in today’s Gospel.

The teaching in today’s Gospel is not that it is wrong to be rich; after all, such people like Abraham, David, Zacchaeus, Cornelius, Lydia, and many others mentioned in the Bible were rich, but that no one can enter the kingdom of God by their own resources. When Jesus said that the most respected members of the culture could not earn their way into God’s kingdom, He was saying that 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.

Jesus then revealed the one and only way to enter the kingdom of God. **“Jesus looked straight at them and said: “With men it is impossible but not with God. For with God all things are possible.”** Here we come to the central teaching of our text. It is indeed true that no one can earn his or her own way into the kingdom of God. Instead, ***God must do all the work***.

When God does all the work, it makes it look easy for us. Earlier in the service, we had the confession of sins where all we did was speak a few words and then we received forgiveness. It’s easy because *God does all the work*. Holy baptism looks simple. A few words are said, and a little water is sprinkled. It doesn’t look like much. God makes it look easy because *He does all the work*. Whenever we gather for the Lord’s Supper, the pastor says a few words over wafers and wine. It doesn’t look like much because *God does all the work*. Even now, this sermon sounds like any other speech. It doesn’t seem like that big of a deal because God makes it look easy.

In fact, in all these things, we witness something more amazing than a camel passing through the eye of a needle. We witness God at work forgiving sins. In holy baptism, in holy absolution, in the preaching and reading of the Word, in the Lord’s Supper, ***God is at work***. The Holy Spirit is busy pulling people into the kingdom of God.

However, although it is easy for us, it was not easy for Jesus. A camel through a needle’s eye pales in comparison to what Jesus has done to bring you and me into His kingdom.

For Him to bring you and me into the kingdom of God, Jesus, the Son of God, had to take on human flesh and become one of us. He had to live with sinful people without sinning Himself. Then He had to suffer unjust torture and a cruel death by crucifixion. That is the price that God has paid so that you and I could enter His kingdom. The Apostle Peter reminds us, *“For you know that you have not been redeemed with perishable things, with silver or gold, from the worthless lives you had handed over to you from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a spotless and unblemished lamb,”* (1 Peter 1:18-19). Jesus had to sacrifice Himself for us on a cross. His death, the death of a perfect, holy, and innocent man, did for us what was 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.

When God brought you and me into the His kingdom, everything that Jesus has done now belongs *to us*. Jesus has lived the perfect life, and you and I get the credit. Jesus has sacrificed Himself on the cross, and you and I get the credit. Jesus has risen from the dead, and you and I have the promise of eternal life. Jesus has done all the work. You and I receive all the blessings.

When we think about the miracles that God works so that we inherit eternal life, there are three that stand out. First, Jesus had to take our place and satisfy God’s justice. Second, the Holy Spirit had to work the miracle of faith in us. Finally, the Holy Spirit continually delivers forgiveness through the Gospel. Jesus has taken our place by living the perfect life, dying on the cross, and rising from the dead. The Holy Spirit has done His part by joining us to Jesus in faith so that everything Jesus did now belongs to us. Now the Holy Spirit delivers forgiveness to us in the Gospel of water and Word, the audible Gospel of absolution and preaching the Word, and the very body and blood of Christ in our mouths. That is quite a set of miracles. **“With men it is impossible but not with God. For with God all things**

are possible.” Eternal life is a present reality for each of us, solely by the work of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, to whom all glory and honour belong. Amen.

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

PRAYER FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, heavenly Father, we come to You in the precious name of our Saviour Jesus Christ, to praise You and pray to You. We thank You for Your constant love to us in days of happiness and prosperity, and for Your unfailing mercy in times of trouble and hardship. We thank You also for the joys of family life, the warmth of friends, and the blessings of all other God-pleasing human relationships. We praise You for giving us clear and sure directions for our life, and for standing by us when the future looks dark and uncertain. But, above all else, we thank and praise You for the gift of Your dear Son, through whose death and resurrection You have made us Your own for ever, and shown such great love to us.

We trust You to continue to supply our food and clothing, and pray You to make us content with what You provide. Grant that we may not set our hearts on uncertain riches. Keep material things from competing with our duty to love You with our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Bless your church with faithful pastors. Give Your Church warm love for You, joy in its fellowship around the Gospel, faithfulness to Your Word, and eagerness to do Your work. Give us opportunities to witness to people who need to hear the Gospel from us, and bless our efforts for Your kingdom. Lead us daily by Your Holy Spirit, that we may understand Your Word and will more clearly, and to walk the path of faith, obedience, and love. Guide us by Your light, that we may turn from every folly of our evil age, and use every opportunity to claim Your grace and to live in Your wisdom. Give us joy and happiness, not in evil, but in a life lived in fellowship with You and Your people.

Make all rulers obedient to You, so that all tyranny and oppression may be put down, all lust for power wiped out, and all love for man-made gods destroyed. Protect us from every enemy, so that we may live to serve You and our fellowmen in peace and safety.

Teach all in our families to look to You for every need. Provide them at the right time with everything they need for body and spirit. Guide them, above all else, to rejoice in Your Word, to give thanks to You for everything, and to sing hymns to Your praise.

Be with those who face sickness or sorrow, trouble or danger, and free them from all worry and distress. Be with those who suffer persecution and injustice, and increase their faith and trust as they wait patiently for Your deliverance.

Grant us all these things, and anything else we need, in Christ’s name and for His sake. Amen.

21st Sunday after Pentecost

Ecclesiastes 5:10-20

¹⁰ A person who loves money will not be satisfied with money, and whoever loves wealth will not be satisfied with his income. This also is pointless. ¹¹ When goods increase, those who consume them increase. Therefore, what advantage does their owner have except to see them with his eyes? ¹² The sleep of a labourer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the plenty of the rich man will not permit him to sleep.

¹³ I have seen a painful evil under the sun, wealth hoarded by its owner so that it harms him. ¹⁴ That wealth has also been lost in a bad venture. When he has a son, he will have nothing in his possession. ¹⁵ He will go back naked, as he has come out of his mother’s womb. His toil will not enable him to take anything at

all that he can carry away in his hands. ¹⁶ This is also a painful evil. He will depart exactly as he has come. Therefore, what advantage will he gain from exerting himself for the wind? ¹⁷ Moreover, he even used to eat in the dark all his days. He used to be greatly frustrated, sick and angry.

¹⁸ Here is what I have seen to be good: that it is proper to eat, drink and find satisfaction in all the toil in which a person labours under the sun during the few days of his life that God has given him. For that is his lot. ¹⁹ Moreover, when God has given any person wealth and possessions and has granted him the opportunity to enjoy them, to accept his lot and to be happy in his toil, this is the gift of God. ²⁰ For he will not often think about the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the joy in his heart.

Hebrews 4:1-16

¹ Therefore, since the promise about entering His place of rest remains, let us be fearful that any of you will seem to have missed it! ² For indeed we have had the Good News told us, just as they had, but the Word that they heard did not benefit them, because it was not united with faith in those who heard it. ³ For we who have become believers **are entering His place of rest**, as He has said: **“As I declared on oath in My anger, ‘They will certainly not enter My place of rest.’** Yet His works have been brought into being since the foundation of the world. ⁴ For somewhere He has spoken about the seventh day in this way: **“And on the seventh day God rested from all His works.”** ⁵ Again, in this passage: **“They will certainly not enter My place of rest.”** ⁶ Therefore, since it is certain that **some people are entering** it, although those to whom the Good News was formerly told **did not enter** because of their disobedience, ⁷ He is again appointing a certain day, **“today.”** A long time afterwards, He says, through David, as has been stated above, **“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts!”** ⁸ For, if Joshua had given them rest, God would not be speaking subsequently about another day. ⁹ Therefore, a Sabbath rest remains for the people of God. ¹⁰ For the person who **has entered God’s rest has himself also found rest from his works, as God did from His.** ¹¹ Therefore, let us be diligent to enter that rest, that no one may fall by following the same pattern of disobedience!

¹² For the Word of God is living and active. It is sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates even as far as the dividing of soul and spirit and joints and marrow. It also discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ No creature is hidden from Him. All things are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great High Priest, who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us cling to what we confess! ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses. However, we have One who has been tempted in every way like us. Yet He was without sin. ¹⁶ Therefore, let us come boldly to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help us when we need it!

Mark 10:23-31

²³ Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it will be for those who are rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

²⁴ The disciples were amazed at His Words. However, Jesus told them again, “Children, how hard it is 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 person to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁶ They were extremely amazed. They asked one another, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus looked straight at them and said: “With men it is impossible but not with God. For **with God all things are possible.**”

²⁸ Then Peter began to say to Him: “Look! We have left everything and followed You.”

²⁹ Jesus said, “Truly, I tell you, there is no one who has left his house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for My sake and for the sake of the Gospel, ³⁰ who will fail to receive a hundred times as much, now, in this time, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields, with persecutions and, in the coming age, eternal life. ³¹ However, many who are first will be last, and the last first.”