

October 11, 2015  
Mark 10:17-22

Proper 23B  
A First Commandment Issue

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

At first glance as we read through this text from Mark we see a rich young man who is excited to follow Jesus. We also see at the end of the reading a young man that is going away sad because he can't give ALL of his stuff away to the poor. HE could give some...but not all. Some might say this is a perfect text to preach a stewardship sermon on. Well I could, but there is something much much deeper going on here than just a stewardship issue. If we read into the text you can see that this young rich man is dealing with a heart issue.

As we read this text we see that this rich young man comes to Jesus with an honest question. He was struggling with something in his life. He was struggling with his faith. So really, he chose the right person to go to – Jesus, the eternal Son of God. He asks Jesus, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Honest question. Was it the right one...he would quickly find out. Notice there's a problem here...He asks “What must I DO to Inherit eternal life?” Can he do anything to inherit eternal life in the grand scheme of anything? We know that answer. He did not. Really an inheritance is a gift. It's a gift from someone who put you in their will. You and I can't do anything to change someone's will to put us in it, if we are excluded.

Jesus continues with the conversation in a way that the rich young man probably didn't expect. Jesus says, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone? 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 your mother.” Jesus doesn't answer this young's man question in the way this young man thought he would. Jesus answers it with questions. Really Jesus is saying, okay, you want to know what is good, let's use God's definition. Jesus can look beyond the question this rich young man uses.

Jesus here gives this rich young man a brief definition of what is God's definition of good. When really, the young man is thinking sweet, I have lived up to all that. I am good. Eternal life is mine. Isn't that what he says, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” He's checking these off his list. He's thinking, yes, I have kept the law. Heaven is mine.

Jesus is looking into this rich young man's heart and we hear this from Mark: Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him...” Let's pause there for a moment. Jesus loves this rich young man. He wants what is best for him. As we'll see in just a moment, Jesus wants this rich young man to see the error of his thoughts Jesus loves him. No where else in the book of Mark do we see this that Jesus loves someone. Jesus is showing compassion on this rich young man. Jesus is seeking to strip away the man's self-deception about having kept the law.

If you noticed, Jesus only recited the second table of the law. He only recited the commandments that applied to this man's horizontal relationships, his relationships with other people. I am sure that since he was raised in a good Jewish home, he did keep the outward focus of the commandments.

Let's hear what Jesus has to say, "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." Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Jesus hit him right between the eyes with the law. Yes, he may have kept the second table outwardly when it came to his actions. Jesus hit him right where it hurt. He pointed the law directly at him. Jesus reminded him about the first commandment.

As a congregation in the month of September we were learning the first commandment to take it to memory... "You shall have no other gods." What does this mean? "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things."

What does this young man lack? His lack is that he does not put his full fear, love and trust in God above everything else. In the text, we see that his god is his possessions. This man walks away sorrowful because he can't seem to give up his trust in his stuff. It's too great for him.

You might be thinking now...well phew...pastor isn't preaching at me today. He's telling a story of the man in the gospel that had his priorities screwed up. I did, your right. Let me tell you this...you are that man. You have your priorities screwed up...and frankly so do I. Perhaps you and I could live without our possessions. We have other things that we fear, love, and trust in more than God himself.

Perhaps you don't know this, but let me tell you, I have been taking a class on Isaiah, and let me tell you Isaiah speaks strongly against idolatry. It's not right to have another god in your life. It could very well be damning to your eternal soul. Isaiah will even tell you that God will hand you over to your god.

So what is your god? What will you die on a hill for? Perhaps you hold fast to the traditions of the church, perhaps this is your high horse. Perhaps this is your god. Things can't change here at Trinity. Things can't change here at St. Paul. Maybe you want it to be my church, where I am most comfortable, and when I get at all the least bit uncomfortable with change I'll make it known. Perhaps your god is your security, your pride, your family, your health, your friends, and for some of you it's also your riches like the rich young man. Perhaps your god is your education. Perhaps your God is your sports or your child's sports. Perhaps your god is your own children. You see we all have them...we all are like that rich young man. There are things in all of our lives that at times we fear, love and trust in more than God Himself. We are all guilty of the sin of idolatry.

Let's back up in our text...if I would stop here, you too, might walk away disheartened. Jesus looked at this man and loved him. Jesus wanted this man to hear what he needed to hear. Jesus used words of law that caused this man to think. Jesus showed His love for this man by telling him what he needed to hear. The young man didn't like it. In fact he ran from the truth.

His love is the same for you. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit into your lives to convict you of your sin. He might use your parents, your children, your spouse, your friends, and He might even use your pastor in a sermon or private conversation to convict you of that sin. He comes to us through the very Word of God and shines the searing light of the law into our hearts. He shows us our true nature. He takes us to the depths of terror and shows us what we have earned for ourselves. And it isn't good.

It's at this point that the Holy Spirit soothes our souls with the refreshing words of the gospel. The rich young man ran away before He could hear them. Perhaps he did come back, we don't know. Those gospel words bring us refreshment. They point to the fact, that although we fall short in following the law, there is one that has followed it perfectly. There is one that fears, loves, and trusts in God above all things. That one is Jesus Christ your Savior.

Jesus Christ wants you to admit your sins, confess them to Him, so that He can give you a great inheritance, for remember it's a gift. We can't earn it, nor do we deserve it, but He gives it to you. It's all a gift for you.

It's a gift that flows out of His agape love for you. A gift that flows from the cross to the empty tomb to the font to the table. On the cross Jesus' blood was shed for you. He died so that you could live. On the cross water and blood flowed from the riven side of Jesus. On the cross Jesus gave up everything for you so that you can have life. At the empty tomb, Jesus was given His victory over death, because He suffered death for you, because He kept everything perfectly for you. He fulfilled the law, knowing you can't. He did it all for you. This gift of love, this gift of salvation then flows to the font, where you were crucified with Christ and were also raised to new life with Him. Moving from the font, we hear the very Word of God, which then flows to the gifts of Christ's very body and blood at the Lord's Supper.

Here is a tangible way in which HE gives to you the foretaste of the feast to come, a foretaste which grants to you forgiveness of all your sins. A feast in which God says to you, "I am your God. I am your Savior. I love you. You are mine."

Jesus looks into your hearts and has a great love for you. A love that caused Him to die. A love that lives for you. A love that continues to give for you.

So as you think about this love, think to your priorities, the gods in your life that take precedent at times, hand them over to Him, and He will forgive your sin and you can freely live as a forgiven child of God.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.*