

**Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan**  
**The Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost**  
**October 23, 2016**  
**Luke 18:18-27**

*A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"*

*"All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."*

I want to introduce you to a friend of mine. We'll call her Harriet. What do you think of her? She has a nice smile. Her hair is kind of messy. Why am I introducing you to her? Harriet likes people. She likes playing with them and making them happy because that's what balloons do. They make people happy when they play with them. Yet, she is kind of sensitive and do you know what happens when she hears people don't like her?

Do you know anyone who is like Harriet at all? They are normally people who are happy and bubbly, but you can just see them deflate when they hear someone suggest they do something which they want to do or someone has a bad opinion of them? Know anyone like this? Our gospel lesson introduces us to one such man this morning. **"A certain ruler asked him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'"**

**"'Why do you call me good?' Jesus answered. 'No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.' 'All these I have kept since I was a boy,' he said."** Luke introduces us to a young man who is a ruler in his synagogue who comes to see Jesus. I can just picture the exchange between the two in my mind.

The young man comes up with a big smile on his face because he is eager to meet Jesus. He's heard a lot about Jesus and he wants to ask Jesus a question which has been bugging him. He's not quite sure about the path to eternal life. He has an idea about it, but he wants Jesus to confirm whether or not he is on the right path and this is the basis for their exchange. **"A certain ruler asked him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'"**

The young man is conflicted and he hopes Jesus is able to help him. **"'Why do you call me good?' Jesus answered. 'No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"** Jesus' reply starts with a probing question. Why do you call me good? God is the only one in this world who is good. Jesus is asking him, "Are you associating me with God?" This would be a great thing if this young ruler was associating Jesus with God.

Jesus proceeds to share instructions with the man about the path to eternal life. **"You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"** Jesus lists commandments four through eight and you can just see the young man's face getting even brighter. Why would his face get even brighter? **"'All these I have kept since I was a boy,' he said."**

The young man is convinced he has kept these commandments since he was a little boy. Where would he get this idea? This idea didn't come out of thin air. The people around him gave him the impression he had kept these commandments. I'm sure he heard their praise all the time. He was such a good boy. He was honest. He did what God wanted him to do. We get the impression this young man is someone you'd like to have as your son or marry your daughter.

The young man must have felt much like Harriet. All puffed up and happy because he was on the right track to heaven, but Jesus isn't done with him yet. **"When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'"** Jesus encourages the young man to give up everything in this world and follow after him.

What is the young man's reaction? **"When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth."** The young man is deflated at Jesus' request. He becomes incredibly saddened by Jesus' request and walks away from him. Why? He was rich and he couldn't bear to say good bye to his riches. Jesus' request was too hard for him to take. He went away troubled and discouraged rather than with comfort and encouragement.

What can we learn from this rich young man? Do you ever wonder about your eternal salvation? Does it ever keep you up at night? I hope it doesn't. We know the reason we have salvation. We have salvation because Jesus died for our sins. We don't have to do anything to earn our salvation since there is nothing we can do to earn God's forgiveness. Jesus has done it all for us. We don't need to be bothered by our sins anymore.

The rich young ruler felt secure because he thought he had kept God's law. We on the other hand know what true security is before God because of Jesus and his death for us. This is a wonderful thing. Yet, could Jesus' death and the forgiveness which he won for us, ever lull us into the same false sense of security which plagued the rich young ruler? Could we ever abuse the forgiveness which Jesus gave his life to give us?

Jesus has made us his own through his death and resurrection. It is a wonderful gift which he has given to us, but it also comes with a set of instructions. Jesus instructs us to **"Come, follow me."** after we have been made his. How well do you demonstrate in your life the fact you belong to Jesus? Jesus lists several commandments for us this morning. He says, **"Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother."**

We might be tempted to respond with the rich young ruler, **"All these I have kept since I was a (youth)."** I haven't had an affair. I haven't killed anyone. I've never been convicted of stealing. I speak the truth. I honor my father and mother. We might outwardly have done these things, yet how would we respond when Jesus would say, **"You still lack one thing. (Do thing x or y,) and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."**?

What if he said, **"You still lack one thing. (Give up hunting or fishing) and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."** Or what if he said, **"You still lack one thing. (Give up drinking) and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."** Or what if he said, **"You still lack one thing. (Be my faithful witness to your children who threaten to end their relationship with you when you talk about me) and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."**

What would your reaction be if Jesus gave you these orders? I have a feeling a lot of us would react like Harriet the balloon and the rich young ruler. Jesus' request would make us sad, because what he is

asking us to give up hurts. We enjoy leisure activity. We enjoy having a good time. We love our family. Yet, Jesus needs to warn us when these things start to threaten our relationship with him and yes (even though it hurts) he might ask them to give them up to keep following after him.

Has it hit you yet? It is hard to be one of Jesus' followers because many things which we enjoy fight for control of our hearts. The crowd which saw the interaction between Jesus and the young ruler understood this fact. We can see it in their reaction. **"Those who heard this asked, 'Who then can be saved?'"** The crowd understands Jesus is asking them to do the impossible when it comes to following after him.

How is it possible for any of us to remain one of Jesus followers? **"Jesus replied, 'What is impossible with men is possible with God.'"** Jesus says what appears to be impossible for men, is possible for God. Jesus rightly exposes that there are places in our hearts where we elevate other things over following him and these elevations disqualify us from being called his disciples. However, this is where the wonder of his love comes into play.

Jesus says what is impossible for us to do is possible for God to do. We talked about this earlier when talking about our salvation. Jesus has died for us in order to make us his own. Jesus' forgiveness has enabled to be called on of his followers. Jesus' death and resurrection have done the impossible for us. They have made us righteous before God. He doesn't see our sins of loving other things more than him or breaking one of his commandments. He looks at us and sees Jesus.

How does God keep making the impossible remain possible for us? There are many things in things in this world which are fighting for control of our hearts and they all have one thing in common. They all want the impossible to remain impossible. They don't want us to experience the joy of salvation. They don't want us to bask in the wonder of the impossible becoming possible. They want us to dwell in the realm of the impossible.

How do we fight the return to an impossible state? The best way to stay away from the impossible state is by being reminded that Jesus has done the impossible for us. He has made us his own. We don't belong to our hobbies or pet sins. We belong to him. How can we be reminded of this fact? We are reminded of this fact each and every Sunday in his house where he reminds us he has made the impossible possible for us and made us his own chosen followers.

We desperately need this reminder. Why? We need the reminder because without contact with him we go back to the impossible way of life and away from him. However, he continually reminds us of the fact he has the impossible possible for us when we listen to his voice in church and in personal devotion with the Meditations or time spent in the Forward in Christ. Thank God he has made the impossible possible for us and may he continue to remind us of this throughout our lives here on earth. Amen.