

Sermon for the Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost
“Impossible and Possible”

Mark 10:23-31

10/21/18b

Focus Statement: Impossibly bound in our inborn sin, trust in riches, and natural idolatry, we are saved and enter the kingdom of heaven only by the grace of God for whom nothing is impossible—by His grace through faith in God’s Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Function Statement: That the hearers come face to face with their own inability only to rejoice in the ability of God to do all things, including bring them eternal salvation in His only Son, Jesus Christ.

Dear friends in Christ,

We have in today’s Gospel reading the continuation of last Sunday’s account of the rich man who approached Jesus with the question what he must do to inherit eternal life. In reply Jesus said, first, “Why do you call me “good” (for the man had addressed Jesus as “Good teacher”)? No one,” Jesus said, “is good except God alone” (Mark 10:18). Then Jesus pointed the man to the commandments. “Since I was young,” the man answered, “I’ve kept them all.” At last Jesus said, “One thing you lack. Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me.”

Do you remember the response of the rich man? Did he do what Jesus asked him to do? Did he immediately schedule an auction of his prized possessions? Did he make plans to lace up his sandals and join the happy company of Jesus’ disciples? No, he did not. The man became very sad when he heard the thing that Jesus asked. Unwilling to part with his great possessions, the man left Jesus and went away.

Today we have heard what happened immediately after this—how Jesus taught His disciples how very hard it is for those with wealth to enter the kingdom of God. Now the disciples had of course just witnessed the whole incident with the rich man and his decision to walk away from

Jesus. We're never told just what went through the disciples' minds when that happened, but we could well imagine that they were distressed to see it—this upstanding, well off man, moral, religious, devoted to the Law...and yet parting ways with the Lord. The disciples, I think, probably also did a bit of soul-searching, wondering to themselves how readily they could part with great wealth, were they in the shoes of that rich man. Readers of the Bible today naturally wonder the same thing. I wonder what I would have done.

Today's Hebrews reading speaks of God's Word as a penetrating sword! Maybe you've felt its cuts a time or two already this morning! Our epistle declares that "the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. [It is] a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). Whenever God's Word addresses the issue of money and possessions, it very readily "discerns [our] thoughts and intents"! God's piercing Word uncovers the greed, the greed that lurks *in all of us*—in every human heart! A crucial truth to be appreciated as we ponder today's reading from Mark 10 is that the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve are *all* inclined to put their trust in money and material things. Regardless of how many dollars we have, and how much "stuff" we own, we all, to be honest, would like a little bit more, because, well, we're fond of money and we're fond of things, and we believe possessions make us happy and secure. But do they? Today's Old Testament lesson points out a commonly overlooked fact: that people craving wealth are never satisfied. "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase" (Eccl. 5:10).

If money can buy happiness, ask yourself: Why did the rich man walk away from Jesus so sad that day?

If money can buy happiness, ask yourself: Why are your wealthy neighbors using drugs and alcohol to soothe their pain?

But again, don't just look around, look within! We're all in the same boat, since we're all fallen children of Adam and Eve. Doesn't Jesus teach this in our text? When the disciples hear Jesus say that a camel could sooner squeeze through the eye of a needle than a rich man enter the kingdom of God, they are astonished at this and those disciples ask the question who even *can* be saved? What does Jesus reply? "With man," Jesus declares. IMPOSSIBLE. The Lord teaches that NO ONE CAN BE SAVED—not by anyone's own power or goodness, that is.

We miss the point this morning unless we realize that mankind's fall into sin has left us all by nature no different from that rich man in the text—attached to and trusting in the wrong things entirely!

"With men it is impossible"—with those words Jesus strips me of all my pride and self-righteousness. The Lord with those words equalizes us, declaring that we are all alike unfit for the kingdom of God.

Yet God is the God of hope (Romans 15:13)! Jesus has more to say, and hope is given to you by Jesus with His next words. Jesus adds: "But not with God; for with God all things are possible" (10:27).

These hope-giving words are like the words with which Yahweh once assured Abraham and Sarah that she would indeed bear a son, as God had said. With God all things are possible. These hope-giving words are like the words with which the Lord's angel assured young Mary that she, though a virgin, would conceive and bear a son—the very Son of God.

With God all things are possible.

Go back for a minute to that camel that Jesus was describing. Remember? It was supposed to fit through the eye of a needle. Impossible, right? Right. Our minds recoil at the thought of it; it just doesn't make sense. Camels can't fit through eyes of needles. Likewise you and I, whose sinfulness and miserable failings are always before us,

you and I cannot, we have been reminded today, of our own strength attain to holiness and enter the kingdom of God. We cannot purely love God and delight in and cherish Him above all things, trusting completely and totally in Him and His Word. But listen to the hope-filled message of Jesus. Get ready for the limits you thought you knew to be entirely burst apart. Just look and listen to what Jesus is teaching us here—that our gracious God makes the impossible possible for us. Through His dear Son, both crucified and raised, dead and alive—and that entirely *FOR US*...through His Son God makes possible our entrance into His kingdom by the gift of faith alone. The sinner becomes a saint, the outcast rebel becomes God’s dear child! Less likely even that a huge beast squeezing through a tiny opening in a needle—*but nonetheless true, by virtue of all that Christ has done for us!*

You the Holy Spirit renews and re-creates with a God-given faith in Jesus Christ, and you the Holy Spirit blesses with a new heart born of water and the Word of God.

You the Holy Spirit delivers and liberates from that bondage to greed and misplaced trust in riches, so that you can trust in God and call Him “Father” with all confidence that He will meet your needs!

You! Me!

We could never, ever save ourselves, we could never, ever hope to enter the eternal kingdom of God, but, wonder of wonders!, God has entered in and saved us! The Gospel promises that God in grace has sent His Son to open the kingdom of heaven to us, having cleansed us from all our sins! Because what is impossible with man is possible with God! Lo and behold, the camel goes through the eye! God changes impossibility to possibility for you and me!

And this spills over into every corner of our lives, which through God’s grace are now arenas of *possibility* in our faith and service. We have been given grace to trust God for all that we need such that we can now

also follow the example of the disciples and leave behind whatever things God may call us to leave behind, trusting that more will be given to us according to God's will—"a hundredfold" in this life, Jesus declared (Mark 10:30). We can cheerfully do the will of God as those who belong to His kingdom now and forever. Because what has been impossible for us is possible for our God!

[Our new District President, Rev. Roger Schlechte, and "know the truth : understand the culture : live the faith" vision for the Rocky Mountain District. In his heart he holds this hope that we may truly love and serve our neighbors. Emboldened and encouraged by Jesus' promise about God's unlimited power and grace toward us, we can eagerly pursue this vision...]

[Our stewardship—today we will return our offering pledge envelopes filled out one year ago (to God be the glory)—we are able to cheerfully answer the call of God to offer our entire selves for His kingdom's purposes, for God who does the impossible is our God forever!]