

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: Mark 10:17-31
Related Text: Hebrews 4:12-16
Date Preached: October 11, 2009

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

If all you had to do was to love your neighbor, life would be grand. In the lesson from the Gospel of Mark we just heard, this rich man has loved his neighbor. He honored his father and mother. He did not murder, steal, bear false witness or commit adultery.

Now, good Lutherans that we are realize that if one looks at what these commandments mean then he like us is guilty. Yet, Jesus doesn't point out the specifics here. Rather, Jesus tells him that there is one thing lacking.

It is great that you've kept the second greatest commandment, but how about the first? Jesus loved this man but had to confront him with the truth. "You lack one thing; go sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

To put it another way, lay aside all that is in the way of keeping the first commandment. "Love the Lord

your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your soul.”

This rich man went away in shock and in grief. Those are words that may surprise us in this context. Shock and grief are normally associated with death. What then does this man grieve? He has all the stuff he needs. Yet, he is still naked.

What he is beginning to grieve is the reality that confronts all of us. It is the reality that we put many things in higher priority than our relationship with God. The more stuff the more secure we feel. Our culture conditions us to make us think that if we have this product or read this book or buy this program, we will be better for it.

Yet for all we have they are but masks that keep us from seeing the wider picture. No matter how much we have, Jesus points out that there is still one thing missing. It is the one hundred percent trusting relationship with God.

The rich man that Jesus is speaking to today isn't any of those listed on the Forbes Fortune 500 list. The rich man or woman is us. Jesus, the very Word of God, strips away not only the possessions that inhibit our relationship with God. Jesus is also at work

stripping away our attitudes. The biases, the discrimination, our sense of entitlement, our puffy egos, are all being cut away, until literally there is nothing left for us to hide behind.

That is the message from the reading of Hebrews. “Before God no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.” Hebrews 4:13.

And before we try to defend ourselves we might want to consider Jesus' Word to Peter. Peter tries to point out that he and the other disciples have sacrificed everything to follow Jesus. Yet Jesus is having none of it.

Because what Jesus says to Peter is look what I have given you. I have brought you into a much larger community than you had before. I have brought you into a fellowship with other believers. You have more than one person to show you motherly love.

In other words, Jesus is saying to us look around and see what I have given you. I have brought you into relationship with these people. These are people who will embrace you and say, “You belong.” You are welcome here. Come, sit in my pew with me.

I have brought you into a community that will feed you and feed you well. We will cry with you in your sorrow in meetings of Take Heart and we will celebrate your joys, at each wedding, baptism, birthday, first communion, confirmation, graduation and all the things that bring joy.

Jesus, the one coming to judge the living and the dead, strips us down to our very core. Nothing is hidden. There is nothing to hide behind. Our life is an open book, skeletons and all.

Jesus does not leave us naked. He is not one who runs from us regardless how much of our lives are less than pleasing. What Jesus does do, is clean us.

In the waters of our baptism, Jesus drowns out all our false motives and pretenses. Jesus lifts us up out of the water, a new creation. Naked and helpless as we are, Jesus clothes us with his grace, mercy and love.

Wet with grace and sparkling in mercy, Jesus love radiantly shines in us. The impossible has happened. God in Christ has saved us. Each of us is a walking miracle. Each of us is a treasured child of God.
Amen.