

**Lectionary 28B [Pr 23]**  
**Grace Lutheran Church**  
**Lakeland, FL**  
**October 10, 2021**

**Amos 5:6-15**  
**Psalms 90:12-17**  
**Heb 4:12-16**  
**Mark 10:17-31**

Grace to you and peace from God and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

Once again, our Gospel reading is a story that may be familiar to us; one that we've heard some number of times; one perhaps that we learned in Sunday School in years past.

Jesus, again is with the crowds teaching and touching and loving. And a man comes to him, kneels in front of him, calls him "Good Teacher" and asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus gives a predictable answer: keep the commandments, the Torah, that teaches about life with God and each other. The young man answers that he has done this. And then Jesus says this: Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor then come and follow me. And then disheartened, the young man turns and walks away for he had great possessions.

This account has a bit of a hard teaching in it, doesn't it. And because of that, we often go to great lengths to soften those hard edges that might come just a little too close to us. We make some assumptions, we grasp for threads of facts that aren't facts at all. Because some of this seems just too hard. So, let's take a look.

One of the ways that we distance ourselves from this is to cast this young man with characteristics we ourselves would never own. We've seen him as one who comes with a touch of arrogance or smugness. We contrast that with our self-perceived humility and modesty. Though there is nothing in the text that suggests that he is arrogant or smug – actually, to the contrary. He kneels before Jesus, a posture of humility.

Then there's that whole camel and needle issue. Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." A camel going through the eye of a needle is clearly impossible. So, we've come up with some ways to soften that edge as well – some have suggested that there was a city gate in Jerusalem called the Needle Gate that was very narrow and a camel had to be unpacked before it could squeeze through this small opening. So, while it was difficult, it was not altogether impossible. Well, that's interesting but the problem is that there isn't any reliable record of this "Needle Gate" existing until the 15<sup>th</sup> century when it began to appear in writings on this text.

Then some have noted that the word for "camel" in the Greek is very similar to the word for "rope." And since the disciples were fishermen, they would need to mend their nets and would use a very large needle for that task and would need to use material more like a rope than sewing thread for that. Threading a large needle like that with a thick coarse rope-like material would be very difficult but, could conceivably be done.

Yeah, sure, that's probably what Jesus meant.

Or, this – yes, I'm sure Jesus meant exactly what he said in this text – it WILL be hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. Poor souls. Good thing I'm not rich. Really?

With all of these attempts of ours to be sure that we are one of those who inherit eternal life, and not one of the other poor schmucks, we miss the very heart of the Gospel found in this account. Jesus looked at the disciples and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God. For God, all things are possible.”

That, my friends, is good news. What is impossible for us, is possible for God. And haven’t we seen that in our own lives – those times when all we can do is tie the proverbial knot and hang on and then God provides a way out, or a way through. With God, all things are possible.

Yet, we can’t brush off our hands, close up shop and call it a day just yet. We need to look at the conversation between the rich man and Jesus. The rich man, the one who had all the comforts that life had to offer in that day, this one comes to Jesus. Don’t you wonder why? He had it made! But he, like all of us, no matter what our wealth or status or health or prominence seek a deep relationship with God. St. Augustine said, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you O God.” We know that there are many today who seem to have it all, but at their core, they too hunger for God.

So the rich man asks Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus acknowledges that this man knows the Torah – Jesus lists several of the commandments. And this good Jewish man, says, “Yes, I know these and I have kept them from my youth.” He was responding in a matter-of-fact way – somewhat like, if someone said to us – “you are to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” To which we would respond simply, “I’m in church every Sunday.”

Then, looking at the man, deep in his eyes and loving him very much, Jesus says, there’s one more thing – all of those possessions of yours – all of those things that are evidence of how hard you worked, all of those things that you inherited from your father, all of those things that demand your care and attention, all of those things that you see as signs of God’s favor – all of those things? I want you to sell them and give the money to the poor. And then, come and follow me. And the man was flummoxed and went away grieving because he had many possessions.

Jesus had issued to this man a call to be one of his disciples – come, follow me. And this one was now counting the cost. What is it that we cling to so tightly? That we hold on to because it holds a treasured place in our hearts? That we are most slow to part with? You see, the focus of this text this morning is not on how much we give to God or the church. It’s not on stewardship. Instead, the focus is on following Jesus – on discipleship. What do we hold on to that makes it difficult for us to come and follow Jesus? Discipleship requires that we make choices and decisions – about ourselves, our life, our relationships. That is part of our responsibility as followers of Jesus.

And, we don’t ask that question as individuals only. We, as a gathered community of faith must ask that as well. What does it look like for us here at Grace to follow Jesus? What are all those possessions of ours – those things that are evidence of how hard we have worked over the near 115 years of Grace’s existence, those things that demand our care and attention, all of those things. How do these fit into our collective response to follow Jesus, to love and serve him as his disciples? To share God’s love with each other, our community and the world.

Jesus recognizes that the Twelve and even the larger band of those traveling with him have left it all to follow him. And Jesus promises that what has been left behind so that they may follow Jesus will be replaced a hundredfold in the new family of faith to which they belong. Good news indeed.

In reading this Scripture again, I was struck by the fact that there isn’t really an end to the story of the rich man. We don’t know what happened after the man left. We don’t know if he went back to life as he knew it, life with that restlessness that only God can fill. Or, if upon counting the cost, he did exactly as

Jesus told him – relinquishing his hold on all of his “things” and then coming to follow Jesus. You see, with God, all things are possible.

Thanks be to God.