

**St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 10:17-31

***“You Cannot Earn It”***

Heavenly Father, we have so much to be thankful for. What an unbelievable week, where devastation took place in parts of Georgia and Florida. The blessings that you put upon so many, the crops that were ruined, but yet we were reminded at the end of the week that a man that has been in jail, tortured and at a home prison in Turkey – just because he loves Jesus Christ is now free! Thank you Lord that you remind us that when we look to you – things happen. And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

There tends to be two times in people’s lives when they purposely seek Jesus:

- when you lose everything
- when you have everything

Part of that really hits home when you look at the destruction that happened just Wednesday in Florida, and some of the farms in South Georgia. The cotton – it was going to be a boom year – and yet crops were devastated and the pecans, with Hurricane Michael. This past week was an incredible week! Wednesday night was cancelled, a curfew was imposed upon this city but thank God was lifted at 8:15 Thursday morning. There was cleanup that had to take place; some people were without power for quite a while. Tony Paulk, who is the mayor in Douglas had put out a statement that said, “all of Douglas’ lights were back on!” I was told that is not really so, because parts of the city of Douglas are not on city power. Gray taught me that. Over in Touchton Woods they are on the coop – that is Satilla. We take a lot of things for granted. Thank God for generators. There are many that lost everything – just watch the news, and as they show videos of South Florida and the damage – all I can say is ‘O My Lord!’ Can you imagine after a storm – and you are heading home only to find out you have no home? I cannot even fathom that. All of the things that you have been saving for so many years – you know – your kids first outfits and all those little things – even though they are now 30 years old – but you still hold onto those things, and yet there are many that are extremely grateful that they still have everything!

The event from today’s Holy Gospel that took place in Jesus’s life is recorded not only in Mark 10:17-31, but also in Matthew 19:16-26, as well as Luke 18:18-27. These describe an event where a rich, young ruler who asks Jesus “*what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” Jesus’ immediate answer appears kind of strange. “*Why do you call me good?*” Jesus then went on to say: “*No one is good-except God alone.*” Jesus addresses what I believe to be the greatest misconception about inheriting eternal life? That a person can someday, somehow or somehow be good enough to inherit eternal life. I remember a conversation I had in my office with a parishioner who was questioning whether or not he was going to go to heaven. We had some incredible talks and I shared some readings that he should take a look at. You cannot earn your way to heaven! That became real to him. No one is good – except God!

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If I were to ask for a show of hands of everyone here who thinks they are good people or who know someone who is good we would all raise our hands, right? We all think we are good – and that person might be sitting right next to you, rubbing shoulders. If we think we are good or know someone who is good, then how could Jesus say that only God is good? It is simple, we judge goodness on a whole different scale than Jesus does. If Jesus said that only God is good, then goodness is behaving like God would. On the other hand, we don't define goodness as behaving like God. Humanity lowers the bar, we lower the standard and some people lower the standard even more than others do. It reminds me of the old dance- the limbo – where you lower the bar and the lower it goes it becomes more difficult.

In today's Gospel reading this rich young ruler had for himself a very high standard for goodness. He did not murder; he did not commit adultery; he did not steal; he did not lie; he did not cheat; he did not dishonor his father and mother. Do those things sound familiar? You know what? That is a higher standard than many people have! Hopefully we would never murder or commit adultery but how many of us can say we have never stolen, lied, cheated or dishonored our father or mother? I think there might be a whole different set of hands! Although you and I may fall short, this rich young ruler thought that he WAS good enough to inherit eternal life. The only conclusion I can come to is if goodness is behaving like God then everyone lacks something!

The Gospel says, “*Jesus looked at him and loved him.*” He had compassion for him. “*One thing you lack,*” he said. “*Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*” (Mark 10:21) The man's reaction was one that might surprise you – but then again it may not. “*At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.*” (Mark 10:22)” Can you imagine receiving a call on your life from Jesus Christ, from God Himself and the first thing that hits you is - look what I am going to have to give up! I wonder what would go through your head if Jesus spoke to you? Would the first thing be about the tag sale or garage sale that you would have to have to clear your house? Or would it be about yes Lord, Yes Lord, yes, yes Lord?

Well, Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “*how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.*” (Mark 10:23) We often think that it is only bad things that keep people from entering the kingdom of heaven but sometimes it is our good things that do the greater damage. Let me give you an example. Jesus said in Matthew 13:22 “*The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desire for other things choke the word of God, making it unfruitful.*”

There are a number of reasons why Jesus said that it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

- The Apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:10 “*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*”

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- We can be deceived into thinking our material blessings are somehow a sign from God that He approves of who we are and what we do: “*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. All this I will give you,*” he said, “*if you will bow down and worship me.*” (Matthew 4:8-9)
- We cannot love both God and money. What comes first in our lives?

Then Jesus told them “*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.*” (Mark 10:25) Please understand, Jesus is not saying that people who are wealthy are not getting into heaven. It is who you put first! He is saying that it is how you use that money that can corrupt – or bless other people. It is the heart and who you love – Jesus – that will get you to heaven. Not too long ago we had a Gospel reading when the Pharisees asked Jesus “why do your disciples not wash their hands before eating?” Jesus addressed that by saying “it is not what goes into your mouth that makes you unclean – it is what comes out of your mouth that makes you unclean.” It is what is in your heart! It is the heart – it is who we love – Jesus – that will get you to heaven!

If no one is good except God, then it is natural for us to react and say the same things that the disciples said in verse 26. “*The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “who then can be saved?”*” In other words, if you cannot be good enough or rich enough to inherit the kingdom of God then who can be saved? Wow, this is exactly what Jesus wants them to see!

Jesus loves and saves repentant murderers, liars, cheats and drunks but there is one kind of person He can never save. That is the person who does not see his or her need for a savior. The person who thinks they can do it all by themselves to get to heaven – there is no hope for them. You have to put your trust in Jesus! The whole point that Jesus is making and that the disciples are finally understanding is that it is impossible for even very upstanding men and women to save themselves. If it is impossible for men and women to save themselves then we must look elsewhere for the source of our salvation. My brothers and sisters – you are here on a Sunday morning for one reason - you NEED a Savior! His Name is Jesus Christ.

There are people who go searching, looking to different philosophies or religions for the source of their salvation but according to the words of Jesus - only God can save us. “*With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.*” There is good news and bad news: the bad news is that you and I can never be good enough or rich enough to inherit eternal life, but the really good news is that God has made it possible for us to inherit eternal life. We inherit eternal life only – and I stress only - by accepting the free gift of God’s salvation and that is His son Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Christ, Yeshua.

Eternal life is an absolutely free gift. It is not something that we can earn or buy, it is something that is a precious, absolutely free gift. This is why we can literally sell everything and still have exactly what we need to get into heaven. And when Jesus pointed people to God - what He was really doing was pointing people to Himself. In verse 21 Jesus implied that to follow God was

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the same as following Him. That makes sense because Jesus is God Incarnate – God in the flesh!

Did you notice that in verse 18 Jesus asked the rich young ruler why he called Him good since only God is good? The logic here is that if Jesus is good then He must also be God. Therefore, we inherit eternal life by admitting and repenting, turning away from our behavior, our sins, recognizing our need for a Savior and that only Jesus is that Savior – and accepting Him as Lord. It is so clear when you just listen to ALL of these words: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* And now buckle up! *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”* (John 3:16-18) People love to throw around John 3:16 – but 17 and 18 people keep holstered. You have got to look at the whole three verses.

Being raised as a Roman Catholic, I once believed that in order to get to heaven I needed to be good enough – and I am pretty sure that there are many others who still believe it. I don’t judge it – I have three sisters who are Roman Catholics – I pray for them every day. They are great people! I can never be good enough to earn a place in heaven. There is nothing I can do to earn my place to heaven – and that is because it has already been done – it was done on the cross at Calvary on what we call Good Friday; when Jesus went to the cross in my place, in your place – and in the place of all sinners. Only by admitting our imperfections and recognizing that Jesus purchased for us our place in heaven by His death on the cross that we inherit eternal life and we receive this by faith. The opposite of faith is fear. Don’t fear eternal life – receive it by faith! Thank you Jesus for loving us so much that you gave us THE WAY to eternal life! John 14:6 is the verse that comes to my mind at this moment. On the night before He dies, Jesus looked at His disciples and said, *“I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am you may also be.”* Thomas said we don’t know the way! Jesus then said, *“I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, but through Me!”* He is THE WAY to eternal life.

Someone said that receiving eternal life is like the hand of a beggar reaching up to receive the gift from the king. Knowing and accepting the King of Kings makes accepting that gift possible.