

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, October 11, 2015, Year B

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

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 10:17-27

***"Not Good Enough"***

Have you noticed that there tends to be two times in people's lives when they purposely look for Jesus:

- when you lose everything, and
- when you have everything.

Although rich, young and a ruler – the man in today's Holy Gospel prompts Jesus by asking Him a very deep question. Please turn with me to today's Holy Gospel on page 1574 of the Pew Bible. Mark chapter 10, verse 17. "*Good teacher, **what must I do to inherit eternal life?***" Jesus' immediate answer appears strange. "*Why do you call me good? Jesus answered. No one is good-except God alone.*" Jesus goes for the gusto and addresses what I think is the greatest misconception about inheriting eternal life – and that is that someone can someday, somehow or somehow be good enough to inherit eternal life. The answer is plainly -no one is good – except God!

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? If we think we are good or know someone who is good then how could Jesus say that only God is good? You see, we judge goodness differently than Jesus does. Let me explain: If Jesus said that only God is good then **goodness is behaving like God would**. On the other hand we do not define goodness as behaving like God. We lower the standard and some people lower the standard more than others do.

In our Gospel reading this morning from Mark, the rich young ruler had a very high standard for goodness. Jesus asked him if he knew the commandments. His response showed that he was quite obedient and 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. He told Jesus in verse 20 that he had kept all of the commandments, since he was a little boy! That's a higher standard than a whole lot of people have today! 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?** Although you and I may fall short, this rich young ruler thought he was good enough to inherit eternal life? But if goodness is behaving like God - then **everyone lacks something**.

Let's see what happens next in verse 21. "*Jesus looked at him and loved 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."* At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth." Can you just imagine what was going through this rich, young man's mind? Because he was rich he did not want to give it up. Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "*How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.*"

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 can and will do the greater damage.

Jesus, in the Gospel of Matthew spoke of just such damage. *“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.”* (Matthew 13:22)

Don't get me wrong, having money is a very good thing – it is how we use it that makes the difference. There are a number of reasons why 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”*
- We can be deceived into thinking our material blessings are somehow a sign of God's approval. That my friends is sometimes known as the “prosperity gospel.” If you believe hard enough Cadillac's and other things are going to come your way! *“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.

Jesus went on to say that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for anyone to love both God and money.

If no one is good except God then it is natural for us to react and say the same things as the disciples 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? This is exactly what Jesus wants them to see?

We know and have seen that Jesus saves murderers, liars, cheats and drunks who repent 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 whole point that Jesus is making and that the disciples are suddenly seeing and understanding is that it is impossible for even very upstanding men and women to save themselves. If it is impossible for people to save themselves then we must look elsewhere for the source of our salvation.

I want to ask those present who are in agriculture: when you plant seed – do you make it grow? You prepare the soil, you fertilize, you plant the seed and you wait. You can water it; you can do all of the things necessary, but only – as some people would say “nature makes it open.” Nature is God! God cracks open the kernel .

People look to 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.*” The bad news is that you and I can never be good enough or rich enough to inherit eternal life but **the good news is that God has made it possible for us to inherit eternal life.** We inherit eternal life only by accepting the free gift of God’s salvation and that is His son Jesus – and the sacrifice that He made on the cross on our behalf. Isn’t that amazing? That’s good news! **Eternal life is a free gift.**

I don’t know if you are old enough to remember an old TV show called “The Millionaire.” There was a man named John Beresford Tipton who would send Michael Anthony out with a small little black briefcase and he would find the person whom John Beresford Tipton had chosen to receive a tax free check for one million dollars. No strings attached! That is grace – no strings attached! **Eternal life is a free gift.**

This is why we can literally sell everything and still have exactly what we need to get into heaven. When Jesus pointed people to God the Father, what He was really doing was pointing people to Himself. In verse 21 Jesus implied that to follow God was the same as following Him. This is 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 of our sins, **recognizing our need for a savior** and that only Jesus is that savior – **and then accepting Him as Lord.**

How many people have a fish on the back of their car? A lot of people! Go to a parking lot over at Harvey’s or Walmart, or wherever you are headed - you always see on cars this little fish, and you say “oh, they are a Christian.” Do you know what the fish means? The fish are an outward testimony of the word ICTHUS. That sounds like “eeew, ICTHUS, I don’t want to touch that ! ICTHUS –it is Ἰησοῦς Χριστός θεοῦ Υἱοῦ Σωτήρ or in English “*Jesus Christ God’s Son Savior.*” The early Christians took the word ICTHUS which means fish, and connected the two o so that if you had this symbol, they knew they were talking to friends and not enemies. You could draw in the sand a half a fish and someone would finish it – and you would know that you agree – that Jesus Christ is not just the Son of God, but that He is also the savior of mankind!

Jesus told Nicodemus, a high ranking official, who snuck into the Temple, for fear of being caught. He wanted to know how he might be born again – to be saved. Jesus told him “*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. 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)

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 that. Well, I

can never be good enough to earn a place in heaven. There is nothing I can do to earn my place to heaven. Do you know why? **It is because it has already been done** – when Jesus went to the cross in my place, in your place – and in the place of all sinners. Only by admitting that we are not perfect, not good enough 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. **Our debt has been paid by God Himself!** Thank you Jesus for loving us so much that you gave us the Way to eternal life! The ONLY Way!

Someone once said that receiving eternal life is like the hand of a beggar reaching up to receive the gift from the king. My dear brothers and sisters, knowing and accepting Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, makes accepting this gift possible. Thanks be to God!

We can never be good enough, but He is not only good enough – He loves us and give us His all, which is more than good enough!