

Sermon for The Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost

Date: October 21, 2018

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Ecclesiastes 5:10–20

Epistle Reading: Hebrews 4:1–13 (14–16)

Gospel Reading: Mark 10:23–31

Sermon Text: Mark 10:23–31

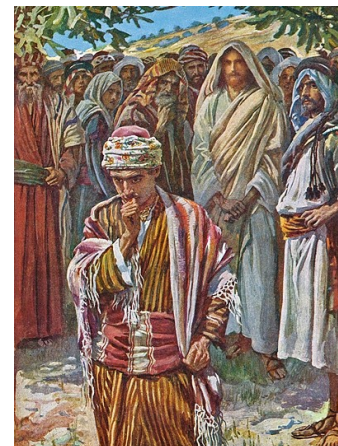
Sermon Title: You Can't be Serious

Hymns:

LSB 729 – I Am Trusting Thee Lord Jesus

LSB 784 - Take My Life and Let It Be

LSB 722 – Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me



Distribution:

LSB 628 – your Table I Approach

LSB 633 – At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing

Liturgy:

Divine Service IV, p. 203



Pastor James Groleau
St. John's Lutheran Church
1200 13th Avenue NW
Austin, MN 55912
Office: (507) 433-2642
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org
FaceBook.com/StJohnsAustin
Twitter.com@StJohnsAustinMN
FaceBook.com/Shepherd.James.Groleau



Text: Mark 10:23–31

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for rich people to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed by his words, but Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter God’s kingdom! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God’s kingdom.”

This amazed his disciples more than ever. They asked each other, “Who, then, can be saved?”

Jesus looked at them and said, “It’s impossible for people to save themselves, but it’s not impossible for God to save them. Everything is possible for God.”

Then Peter spoke up, “We’ve given up everything to follow you.”

Jesus said, “I can guarantee this truth: Anyone who left his home, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or fields because of me and the Good News will certainly receive a hundred times as much here in this life. They will certainly receive homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields, along with persecutions, but in the world to come they will receive eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

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Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

There have been times in my life when I, and I'm sure you too, have wished that I would have lived at the time of Jesus. The idea of hearing the Savior preach or watching His miracles is intriguing to me. When I'm feeling really good about myself I like to think that I might have behaved better than His disciples did.

I like to think those things but the truth is those thoughts are just fantasy. The reality is if I had been there I would have been messing up just like the others. That's because, as I hear Jesus speak I often want to say, "You can't be serious!"

I envision I might have challenged Jesus' words in our Gospel reading for today. Right before the reading Jesus and His disciples are walking along when a rich young man came running up to Him, knelt down, and asked a question. "Jesus what do I have to do to inherit eternal life?"¹ There is a good, and important, question.

Jesus' answer begins with Him listing the Commandments. To which the young man responds, "I know those. I've kept all of the rules."

Now Jesus decided not to publicly embarrass the man by listing all the details concerning the man's secret sins. Instead the Lord went back to the list of Ten Commandments. One of the Commandments He hadn't mentioned previously was the First. The Commandment which encompasses all the rest:

"You will have no other gods before me."²

The conversation probably went something like this. Jesus says, 'Well, My fine young man, that's great. I'm glad you've done all those things. As far as I can see, there is only one more thing that you have to do, give away everything you've got and come follow Me.'³

I have to believe there was a profound pause of silence after Jesus spoke. Although he doesn't say anything I'm pretty sure that young man was thinking, 'Jesus, You can't be serious!' The Bible says that after a bit the man left... and Jesus watched him go. He hadn't kept the Commandments as perfectly as he had thought. He failed to love the Lord more than anything else. After the young man was gone Jesus turned to His disciples and commented:

"It is harder for a rich man to get into heaven than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle."⁴

Now this is where I need to stop in the story and talk to you. If you are like most folks you're probably feeling pretty good, pretty safe about what Jesus has said. If you're like most folks you're saying to yourself, 'Thank heaven I'm not a rich person. Thank the Lord that I'm broke and don't have much to get in the way of me making it through those pearly gates.' If that's what you're thinking, I hope you won't mind if I take a moment to... set you straight. You see you are an incredibly wealthy individual.

1 Mark 10:17

2 Exodus 20:3

3 Mark 10:21

4 Mark 10:25

Let me explain. When Jesus spoke those words one of the the richest men in the world was a guy by the name of Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus. Tiberius was one of Rome's greatest generals, who had risen to the position of the Emperor of Roman.

So, let's compare your riches with that of the Roman emperor? First, let's take a look at the petty cash funds. With money flowing in from all of Rome's territories Caesar was a pretty well off. If he wanted something he would just buy it. When it comes to cash Caesar is a clear winner. He's also a hand's-down victor when it comes to personal assistants. Caesar has slaves and servants who stood at the ready to do anything and everything he could imagine. In the area of power, the legions of Rome are at his disposal. It would seem like Caesar is a whole lot richer than you. That might be how it looks but you shouldn't be too quick to jump to conclusions.

In Rome the summers get hot...very hot...and muggy. What did Caesar do when a week's worth of wicked scorches heat hit the country side? I can tell you what he did, he sweat. In spite of constant fanning by slaves he sweat like stuck hog. You on the other hand must only exert yourself over to the thermostat to adjust the air conditioner. That's one point for you.

Would you like some ice cream? If Caesar wanted a scoop of ice cream in the summer he had to get a bunch of long-distance runners to bring snow down from the mountains. If he wanted fruit in the winter time he had to hope somebody had some apples in the root cellar which hadn't gone rotten. What do you do? Worst case scenario you hop in your car, drive to the store, and pick from a vast selection of options and choices. When it comes to selections of food you're far richer than the ancient Emperor of Rome.

The list could go on. You have a freezer, a microwave, electric lights, a cell phone, a menagerie of miracles of modern technology to make your life more than just manageable. All of which means, you are in most respects, richer than Caesar ever was. In fact you are richer than most people in the world have ever been. So does that mean Jesus is talking to you when He teaches to give away all you've got, and come follow Him? Probably not.

Jesus didn't ask anybody else to give away all they had. He didn't ask it of Mary Magdalene or Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and they had plenty. The order to give away everything is something Jesus said specifically to this one young man, and not really anyone else. Why do you suppose that is? Because Jesus knew that money was the stumbling block in the path of this man's loyalty to His Lord. Money was his problem, but it might not be yours.

In the Old Testament Abraham was a rich man but God didn't tell him to separate himself from his stuff. In fact God told him to pick up all his stuff and move with it.⁵ You see, money wasn't Abraham's problem. He had a different difficulty. Abraham loved his son... at times it seemed as if he loved that son more than he loved God. That's why God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son on an altar.⁶ The sacrifice didn't take place,⁷ but Abraham got the message: the Savior should always be the most important Person in our lives.

5 Genesis 12:1-5

6 Genesis 22:2

7 Genesis 22:11-12

Does that sound a bit unreasonable to you? Is it possible that you are ready to join me in saying, "Lord, You can't be serious! You really don't expect to be ahead of my family, my life, my goals, my dreams. Do You?!"

If you are really asking that question seriously, the Lord will give you a serious straight answer. He will tell you, 'Yes, that's exactly what I expect. When My Son came to earth to save you, I expected Him to dedicate Himself completely to that task. I expected Him to fulfill the salvation promise I made to Adam and Eve.⁸ I expected Him to give His life to save your souls.

Today I am proud to say My beloved Son did exactly as I asked. Every second of every minute of every day of every year, He did what was necessary to save you. My Son gave everything for you.'

God could continue, 'If you know faith in Christ alone is that which forgives your sins and saves your soul, it ought to mean something, it ought to be important, it ought to generate a response, it ought to change the way you live.' So, there you have it. Jesus should be first in your life. He should be, but is He?

That is the way it should be for Christians. It is Christ who should be the most important thing for us..., but is He? Is Jesus the most important Person in your life? Be careful how you answer. You never know where that answer might lead.

In 1874 a lady named Frances Ridley Havergal wrote a hymn. She was quite the artist and she could have done many things with her life, but she concentrated on giving glory to her Lord by writing hymns. Probably the most famous of those hymns is a simple song named, "*Take My Life and Let It Be.*"

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my voice and let me sing,
Always, only for my King.
Take my lips and let them be,
Filled with messages from Thee.

Those were more than just words to Frances. She was a concert soloist. In the years which came after the writing of that hymn her performances changed. She no longer sang secular songs. She gave her voice to her Lord and sang songs which praised her Savior, and the sacrifice He had made for her salvation. She sang of Jesus' unfair death and His glorious resurrection. She sang in ceaseless praise and hearts were moved.

...but there's a third verse you need to hear. It's one which speaks of wealth, and rich people, and the kingdom of Heaven. That verse goes:

Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold.

Take my intellect and use,
Every pow'r as Thou shalt choose.

'Take my silver and my gold.' You know, just about every person who has sung that song has asked, "Frances, are you serious?" She wasn't joking. Four years after Frances wrote that song she realized she had failed in giving her silver and gold to God.

Now Frances had a pretty impressive collection of jewelry, things which she had inherited and which had been given to her. Realizing she had withheld that from the Lord she packed up all her gold and jewels and sent them to her church missionary society. Then, just to be sure she'd done the job right, she included a check to cover the value of the few sentimental items she had kept! Frances wrote to a friend, "I hardly need to tell you I have never packed a box with such pleasure!"⁹...

Now a few minutes ago I left you to ponder the question, "Is Jesus first in your life?" Over the centuries the death of martyrs has said Jesus was first for them, but is He first for you. If I went to your spouse, your children, your friends, your coworkers, and asked, "Is Jesus first in the life of this man, or this woman;" what would they say?

It is my prayer that I would receive a resounding and affirmative answers. That they would tell me that you are a person who lives a life, each day, that says:

Take my life and let it be,
consecrated Lord to Thee;
take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

If that is true for you, may God bless you and be with you. If it is not true, may the Lord touch your heart with the record of the Savior, Who died for sinners; sinners like you. May His Holy Spirit dwell in, and change, your heart so that Christ is the center of your course through life.

I pray that for you, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

9 "Memorials of Frances Ridley Havergal, by Her Sister M. V. G. H." by Maria Vernon Graham Havergal, James Nisget & Co. 1881