B, Pentecost 21

Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church, Brookings, SD

Rev. Matthew Wurm

October 14, 2018

Sermon Text: Mark 10:21

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The sermon text for this morning is Mark 10:21, *“And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’”*

There are what we call, two tables to the commandments –the Law. The first table of the commandments are commandments 1-3. They deal with man’s relationship to God. You shall have no other gods. You shall not misuse the Name of the Lord Your God. Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy. The second table of the Law are commandments 4-10 and they deal with man’s relationship to one another. Honor your father and your mother. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet.

Notice in this Gospel lesson today from St. Mark how our Lord Jesus teaches us about the commandments and salvation. Jesus is about to set out on a journey and a rich young man runs up to Him. The question that the rich young man asks must be urgent. Jesus is about to leave and he’s got a big problem he needs an answer to before Jesus goes His way. The rich young man even kneels before Jesus, likely blocking His way. The young man needs an answer to an urgent and pressing question. And what a great question it is! *“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* This young man cares about eternal things! At least for a moment, albeit fleeting, he appears to be more concerned about eternal things than temporal things. But a fleeting concern for things eternal won’t cut it.

Jesus answers his question with a question, exposing the heart of the rich young man. Jesus isn’t Lord of him. Jesus isn’t his God. No, something else is. Jesus responds, “*Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”* To this rich young man, Jesus is simply a *“Good Teacher”.* He’s an advisor. One that the rich young man seeks answers from to acquire more gain for himself. He wants to get answers on what he must do to inherit eternal life from God, and he’s desperate to acquire them. He runs to Jesus and kneels before him, because, at least for the moment, he’s concerned about eternal thing.

He wants answers on what he must do to inherit something that isn’t his by right, so Jesus tells him what he must do. He must keep the second table of the law. Love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus says, “*Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and your mother.”* The rich young man responds, *“Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and your will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

Jesus looked at him, loved him, and spoke to him saying, in essence, “Love as I have loved you and come, follow me.” It’s of note that Jesus doesn’t answer this rich young man’s urgent request with the first table of the Law, saying, “You shall have no other gods.” Instead, Jesus responds to the man’s request with an answer from the second table of the Law—the man’s relation to his fellow man. His god and his eternal inheritance were revealed by how he dealt with his fellow man. He wasn’t willing to love others the way Jesus loved him. He wasn’t willing to sacrifice for the poor the way Jesus would sacrifice for him. Evidently Jesus’s answer disheartened this rich young man who came to him on his knees and he goes away sorrowful for he loved his possessions more than the answer to eternal life – Jesus.

The rich young man had a god. It wasn’t Jesus even though he called Him “Good” and no one is “Good” except God alone. The rich young man’s great possessions were his god. He wasn’t willing to give them up to the poor and follow Jesus. Disheartening—yes. Disheartening for the young man because he couldn’t keep the god of his great possessions and inherit eternal life and disheartening for us to hear, because he chose to walk away from Jesus and from life everlasting.

There is much to learn from this encounter between the rich young man and Jesus. Possessions, either great or small can become gods. Possessions, in themselves, are not evil. Nor is poverty, in itself an evil thing. How one views his possessions, either great or small, and how one views his poverty is what matters. Does the abundance of your possessions impair you from fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things? Does either the abundance of possessions or the lack there of keep you from caring about eternal things? Does Jesus, looking at you, loving you, and speaking to you have an effect on your soul?

By nature all mankind is an enemy of God. By nature you hate God and love yourself above all things. By nature you would never want to sell any or all of what you have and give it to another. By nature you always want more of those things that make you feel good. You want more money because you think money can buy your security and happiness. You want more property and more stuff because that will make you appear bigger and more significant in this world. You want more sweet foods because they taste better than Brussel sprouts. You want the newest tech invention so that you can show that you are doing better than just keeping up. You want to be in front. You want to be the most important. You want other people to love you for being so great, so popular, so rich, so cool, so much better than so many other people. You want to be your own god and if you just so happen to think about death for a fleeting moment amid your important world of popularity, gluttony and self-indulgence, you’ll maybe even run to catch a Jesus before he departs, and fall down at his knees and ask him what you must do to inherit eternal life. That’s what the natural, carnal, sinful man wants to do.

Resist him, firm in your faith. Drown that carnal man. Kill him. Put him death before the cares of this world kill you. You cannot do anything to merit your salvation but you can merit your damnation. If your view of either riches or poverty keep you from seeing the love the Father has for you in Christ Jesus, put it away from you. Jesus looks on you in love and speaks words of eternal life to you. Don’t let your view of His words be less than your own view of yourself. Whether He has given you great possessions or great poverty, neither your possessions nor your poverty will last forever.

Store up for yourself treasures in heaven where moth and rust will not destroy and where thieves won’t break in and steal. Come follow Jesus. He has an eternal inheritance to give. In fact, He’s already given it to you. It was given in your baptism into Christ when your sinful nature, the Old Adam, was drown and died. Out from that life-giving water sprang up the New Man whose eyes, ears, and heart is always upon the eternal things. Death for you, has been defeated and the eternal inheritance won by Jesus’ blood and merit has been delivered to you by His word and sacrament.

These are the eternal things and real things that do not spoil, fade, or pass away. Like all of your possessions or lack thereof that are here today and tomorrow gone. The Lord’s words of promise and forgiveness, washing and feeding, sanctifying and strengthening remain resolute and always, even if you or others choose not to walk with Him like the rich young man did. You won’t change His looking, His loving, and His speaking to you, saying, “come, follow me.”

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, keep our hearts and minds following Christ Jesus alone. Amen.