

Mark 10:23-31
“The Limitlessness of God’s Grace”
22nd Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 24B)

October 20, 2024
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.
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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Jesus said to His disciples: **“With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God”** (Mark 10:27).

This verse – *when plucked out of its context* – is one of the most misinterpreted and most misunderstood verses in Scripture. You see for many people, when they see those words **“All things are possible with God,”** they immediately think God is offering permission or even encouraging or affirming whatever they want.

And even many wolves in sheep’s clothing disguising themselves as pastors will use that verse as their proof text for *“Name it and claim it,”* or even encouraging their parishioners into sins.

So, if you only name what you want, by claiming what you want to God, then He will give it to you. The problem is that way of thinking is not Biblical and it is against the clear teaching of Scripture. This wrong interpretation puts man in control of God – as a sort of Disney Genie.

Now, taken in context, that verse **“With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God”** (Mark 10:27) teaches the limitlessness of God’s grace.

Last week, a rich young man came up to Jesus and asked Him, **“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** (Mark 10:17). This rich young man expected wise advice and even Jesus’ approval for his riches, but instead Jesus told him to rid himself of his idol worship of his wealth, which became his false god and then follow Him. That price tag on getting rid of his false god was too much for this man.

Jesus’ Law preaching brought despair to this rich young man as He prepared to preach the Gospel. The question for this rich young man is: did he ever hear the Gospel? To that we’ll never know. He may have. He could have repented of his love of money and followed Jesus, or he could have held closer to his false god of money. So, we leave with a cliffhanger.

As this rich young man ***“went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions”*** (Mark 10:22), Jesus turns to the disciples to expound on what just happened.

Jesus gazes around at his disciples before He speaks. Then He said, ***“How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”*** (Mark 10:23b).

Money makes us feel secure. For many people, maybe even yourselves, this security puffs them up. Why would I need to thank and praise God? Life is going well! Why would I need to attend the Divine Service? Life is going well! I’m not struggling, so why would I need God? Life is going well!

As our Old Testament lesson from Ecclesiastes 5 says: ***“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them”*** (Ecclesiastes 5:10-11a). So, for those who love money will never have enough. And in times of inflation, such as now, those with great wealth brings greater anxiety. For the more one has, the more one covets.

But for the disciples, they don’t see money that way. So, they look at Jesus in amazement, since they understood that if a person has much money, they were considered pious, generous, and worthy of God’s favor. Just because of their wealth, they must have special access before God.

To their amazement, Jesus says, ***“Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God”*** (Mark 10:24b-25).

Here, Jesus is talking about a real camel and a real eye of a needle. Jesus is utilizing extremes. The camel was the largest land animal in the region and the eye of a needle was the smallest opening. So, how could a camel go through the eye of a needle? It can’t. It’s impossible!

So, if a rich person cannot be saved, who can?

Jesus then gazes at His disciples again and says, ***“With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God”*** (Mark 10:27).

You see, on your own, entering the kingdom of God is impossible. Not just for the rich, but for all people. So, anything we do, through our merit and various activities, they gain nothing toward our salvation. You may be the most cheerful giver to the church and to various charities, the world may call you good for your sacrificial giving, but if you do not have faith in Christ and cling to Him, that giving – *as great as it may be seen by the world* – is worthless to salvation.

And it's not just riches that can be a barrier to salvation. Another major barrier is the love of self – pride. Or the sexually immoral. Or those who cause division and strife. Really, anything that leads you to think you are doing well on your own without God.

So, is our case hopeless? No! Again, Jesus says, ***“With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God”*** (Mark 10:27).

Through the Holy Spirit, God can move even an idolatrous rich man to set aside his riches and set his fear, love, and trust in God. Now, that is the power of the Gospel! So, what is impossible for people is possible for God to grant to us in Christ.

On our own, we can contribute nothing to our salvation. But by faith in Christ, He contributes everything for your salvation! Through the waters of Holy Baptism, Christ takes all of our sin upon Himself and wraps us up around His robe of righteousness. There, we are joined to His death and resurrection. There, Christ's righteousness is given to us. And as we return to our Baptism in Confession and Absolution, the old Adam in us continually dies and is no longer our identity. Our new identity is in the new Man, Jesus Christ.

Also, when we kneel at the communion rail, we receive Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins, which strengthens our identity in Christ.

Through His Means of Grace – *His Word and Sacraments* – God directs us to His Word, and not our word. He directs us to His promise of forgiveness in Christ the crucified.

But sometimes, even when we are nourished by Christ's Word and Sacraments, our old Adam, that old sinful nature, still tries to take the credit for your salvation. And that was the case for Peter, who said, ***“See, we have left everything and followed you”*** (Mark 10:28).

Here, Peter speaks how he and his fellow disciples have sacrificed everything to follow Jesus. Peter is presuming that his sacrifice will give him merit with God. But the truth is that Peter and his fellow disciples will receive the Lord's blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation. However, not through their own merit, but only through the sacrifice of Jesus.

But Peter is partly right. They have indeed left everything to follow Jesus. What he is correct about is our sanctification. He is right about our Christian life in Christ. And he and his fellow disciples, including you and me, are growing day by day in sanctification.

Through being nourished by Christ's Means of Grace, we change. We change in our relationship with God and with our neighbor. Instead of being self-centered, we grow into sacrificial people. We begin to live out God's will for us. We grow in putting ourselves last, so that we may help and support, and to improve and protect, our neighbor.

Jesus' words today are words of comfort for us. In our lives, we may be spurned and ridiculed, and we may be persecuted for our faith, but Jesus assures us that His grace is limitless. By His limitless grace, which we receive through faith in Him alone, salvation is the gift of God. Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +