

Sunday, October 10, 2021 -- Mark 10:17-31

People of Peace Lutheran Church here in Puyallup, Washington; and people of Peace worshipping on-line: Peace be with you. Thank you, I needed that.

Siblings in Christ, it is good to be with you this morning. For those that I haven't yet met, I am Pastoral Intern Kendall Jeske. I am pursuing my Master of Divinity degree, in order to become a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Part of that process involves practicing pastoral ministry in a congregational setting, and that is what brings me to you!

This is the first Sunday of my pastoral internship in which I am preaching, and I want to start with a word of thanks.

Thank you, Pastor Nate, for agreeing to be my internship Supervisor, to learn with me and to encourage me, and to let me ask you all sorts of questions. Thank you.

Thank you, to my internship committee: Becca, Ellen, Jill, Kevin, and Leo (in alphabetical order). Your input and feedback, as well as your compassion and care, are already valuable pieces of my internship experience.

And thank you, People of Peace, for your generous hospitality and welcome during these early days and weeks of our sharing in ministry together. It is indeed good to be with you.

Pastor Nate begins worship with an invitation to ground yourself in your space, in your body, to be present within yourself and within your worshipping community. Be present to the songs we sing and the prayers we offer. Be present to the lessons we learn and the mysteries of grace that we encounter. Be present in the very presence of God.

Here we are, present, together ... albeit present together both virtually and in-person.

We are present, yes, yet we are also a people who remember our past and think towards our future. Sometimes this can lead us into moments of regret for past mistakes; moments of trepidation and worry for what may be coming next; moments of coulda, woulda, shoulda.

This is the kind of moment we find ourselves drawn into in the Gospel text for today.

As Jesus is setting out on a journey, a rich man approaches Jesus, looking for affirmation of the path he has been on that might lead him to everlasting life in the Kingdom of God.

“Well,” Jesus seems to say, “have you followed the rules?”

“Oh yes,” says the rich man, “since my youth I’ve made a list and checked it twice, just to make sure I’m not naughty but nice!”

While that might be enough for jolly ol’ Saint Nick, there is more that Jesus wants to teach this wealthy man about discipleship; by extension teaching the disciples, and by further extension challenging you and I.

Jesus, with compassion and love in his heart, seems to say “You’ve done good, but you’ve also missed the mark. You’ve done well for yourself, but now put the needs of your community, the poor, the displaced, the refugee, the sick, the imprisoned; put their needs before your own. Then follow me.”

The rich man goes away, shocked and more than a little confused, for his life and work is being turned upside down.

Have you ever felt this way about your life of faith? I certainly have!

There was a time in my life where I was sure that my ethical, moral, occupational and vocational compass was spot-on, due north for the Kingdom of God. And yet, more often than not, it was all about me. I had a case of the religious “me first and the gimme gimmes”.

And so I, once again, find myself in the sandals of Peter and the disciples. The Gospel writer says they are perplexed and astounded at Jesus’ words. I remember seeing camels at the Woodland Park Zoo as a child; those are large animals! Also, my mother is a quilter, and so I have seen and threaded the eye of a needle a fair few times.

So I imagine the disciples' response to be something like. "Wait, what camel? What needle? It's easier for THAT camel to go through the tiny little hole of THIS needle? Well shucks. Now what are we going to do? Is eternal life out of reach for us too?"

A pastor I worked with several years ago challenged my imagination around "eternal life". In his sermon preparations for speaking on John 3:16, he came across a theologian that wondered if "eternal life" meant more than just life after death? What if "eternal life" also spoke to a depth of the quality of life lived? This question has completely changed the way I read "eternal life" in Scripture!

The wealthy person in this story and the disciples share the same question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Or, another way to hear this question, "Well, if what I've done isn't enough, then what is?"

Jesus looked at the disciples and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

Not possible for mortals; but only possible for God. This, THIS is good news!

The wealthy person, Peter nor the other disciples, you nor I can earn eternal length or boundless depth of life by our own doings. What is possible for you and I is limited. But not so for God!

By the free gift of God's grace, encountered at the cross and now found at the Baptismal font and promised in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, we are each freed from the regrets of our past and the worries of our future, freed to be present in the sacred here and now.

Friends, I invite you to consider this: What would it look like to longer ask, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Instead, what would it look like if our question was now, "What am I able to do to encounter the depth of life around me today?"

I wonder where we might find God, present and active, in our own bodies, in our own lives, in our households, in this congregational community, in our local communities, in our nation, and throughout the world and relationships around us...

If it were only up to me, I'd be stuck on the past, ever dreaming of the future.

But the grace of God meets us here, in the present; aware of God's work and promises that came before; with a desire to be attentive to where God is showing up moment to moment; together called and convicted to step into the future with trust, humility, and wonder at what God might do next.

Amen.