

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

October 10, 2021

Psalm 90:1, 12-17 (ESV):

1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place
in all generations.

12 So teach us to number our days
that we may get a heart of wisdom.

13 Return, O LORD! How long?
Have pity on your servants!

14 Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

15 Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,
and for as many years as we have seen evil.

16 Let your work be shown to your servants,
and your glorious power to their children.

17 Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and establish the work of our hands upon us;
yes, establish the work of our hands!

First Reading: Amos 5:6–7, 10-15 (ESV):

6 Seek the LORD and live,
lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph,
and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel,
7 O you who turn justice to wormwood
and cast down righteousness to the earth!

10 They hate him who reproves in the gate,
and they abhor him who speaks the truth.

11 Therefore because you trample on the poor
and you exact taxes of grain from him,
you have built houses of hewn stone,

but you shall not dwell in them;
you have planted pleasant vineyards,
but you shall not drink their wine.

12 For I know how many are your transgressions
and how great are your sins—
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,
and turn aside the needy in the gate.

13 Therefore he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time,
for it is an evil time.

14 Seek good, and not evil,
that you may live;
and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you,
as you have said.

15 Hate evil, and love good,
and establish justice in the gate;
it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts,
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

EPISTLE: Hebrews 3:12–19 (ESV):

12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. 15 As it is said,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

16 For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

THE GOSPEL - Mark 10:17–22 (ESV):

The Rich Young Man

17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” **18** And Jesus said to him, “**Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’ ”** **20** And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” **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.**” **22** Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Sermon 41 – Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

“Break the Rich”

Mark 10:17-22

Dear friends,

In our Gospel lesson Jesus deals with a rich man, an earnest young feller with his heart simultaneously in the right and the wrong place. That's a fair enough description of most of us, we are sinners and saints after all, but this guy is unique in where he is placed in the Gospel, what's going on around him, and in Jesus' reaction to him. Not a lot is said here that is new, but what Jesus is doing is worth a look, because this is something we all need done to us every now and again. We know, we've heard to death that we cannot save ourselves, but breaking us of that delusion is hard work, and God chooses to do that hard work rather than let us die in vain. So, join me in the study of how to break a rich young man. Sounds like fun to me.

Jesus has pivoted to the cross in this section of Mark's Gospel. There have been some distractions along the way, but Jesus has spent the past couple chapters repeatedly telling His disciples and anyone who will listen that the time has come for the Christ to be given into the hands of sinful men, to be crucified, then after three days to rise from the dead. Every time Jesus says this it gets a unilaterally negative reaction. His words frighten the disciples, and they get into Peter's craw so badly that he rebukes Jesus for saying it,

prompting Jesus to call Peter Satan, which must've been a sobering wake-up call to put it mildly. Throughout this entire chapter Jesus has been dealing with what a Christian is. He has told them over and over that He has to do this, He has to get crucified, He has to be beaten and suffer death, if they want to be saved. But each time those that are listening miss the point. The disciples are arguing about who is the greatest, they're preventing little kids from wasting Jesus' time, and Jesus tells them that they must be like that little child if they want to be under God's reign. To take it further, Jesus goes to extreme lengths to show that you cannot do this on your own, that God is the one who makes Christians, that God must save Christians by having Jesus be crucified. He says that if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. You would have to chop off bits of yourself to stop sinning. That's how serious the situation is.

So with all of that, queue the rich man. **“17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** This is a funny question, and the reason it is a funny question is because Jesus has just spent the last chapter illustrating and forcefully telling people that inheriting eternal life is not based on what you do. Now, rich guy wasn't there for this, so we can't begrudge him that, but Jesus, after addressing this over and over, now has to answer the same question. What must I do?

You all know, in your brains, that one cannot do anything to save himself. You have heard me preach this every Sunday for five years plus, and pastors before me do it for decades. This is not a question we put in these terms. But this week I would have you watch yourself, and your thoughts, and see how often this whole idea of “I have to do something” comes up in relation to God. Now, we know life works this way in general. If a man does not work, he shall not eat. That's the world. But God works differently, and we struggle to realize this difference. So watch yourself. Let's say you want something from God, something important, so you ask God about it. God doesn't often give right away, sometimes He does, but not this time. So you've asked God for something, and He waits, and you wait, and you don't see it. If you're like me, you'll end up asking “What do I have to do for you to answer this prayer? What do I have to do to get this?” Then the devil starts chiming in. He starts giving you the feeling that God isn't going to give you what you need, because you did this sin or that sin, because you're not good enough, because He doesn't love you, or because He isn't even there. We Lutherans take great pride in knowing that only Jesus can save us, and we should. We think this isn't a question. But it is. We're far more susceptible to it than we might think. You might not think that

you need to earn a place in heaven, but watch yourself. You might catch yourself thinking that you need to earn God's happiness, earn God's favor, or earn a gift from God. An earned gift isn't a gift, its wages, and the wages of sin is death, and that is the only thing we've earned from God. So we need to relearn this too. What must you do for God to take care of you? What must you do for God to be happy with you? What must you do for God to give you what you need, to hear your prayers and answer them? Nothing. There's nothing you can do for God, at all.

Jesus is about to demonstrate this to the rich young man, but He goes about it in kind of a strange way. **“18 And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”** This sentence seems like a throwaway but I don't think it is. Remember that one of the things that people were most confused about when it came to Jesus was His insistence on being God. Whenever Jesus said this, or inferred it, the Jews would usually lose their patience with Him, several times throughout the Gospels they try to stone Him or murder Him when Jesus does things that only God can do or just flat out says that He is the God promised by the Scriptures. Hilariously, the Gentiles seem to get this straightaway, they have no problems with this. The centurion freely confesses that Jesus is God, having an authority over sickness and death like the authority the centurion has over his troops. Another soldier, after Jesus died, notes that this man was the son of God. Jesus is often frustrated at His people's inability to accept that He is God, and that goes into us as well. When we decide we have to do it ourselves, we are essentially telling God that He is not good enough, that He's not working fast enough, or doing the right thing. We are making ourselves God when we do this, and that's not good for us. So this rich young man is saying, teacher, what must I do so that I can be God. That is what he's asking. He doesn't see it that way, so Jesus realizes that He has to show him this.

“19 You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” **20 And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.”** This quite possibly might be the dumbest thing ever said in the Holy Scriptures, which is saying something, it's certainly in the top 5. Imagine if I said that to you with a straight face. Bethel, I have kept all these commandments from the time I was young. You'd be like “uh huh, *sure* you have.” We do not look kindly on this kind of attitude, but Jesus does, because He sees that this guy wants to get it but hasn't gotten it yet. It's interesting, if this fellow was so convinced he was righteous, why is He asking Jesus what to do? Is he just seeking

affirmation for his self-confidence, or is he getting the sense that he hasn't been good enough? There's no way to tell.

You and I know we could never say this with a straight face, we know the commandments cannot be kept. This guy doesn't seem to. So Jesus decides to show him. **“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.” 22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”** Jesus knows how to hit where it hurts. Jesus knows where our idols are, where our pride is. He knows our weak points. He isn't doing this to be cruel, He's doing this to break this young man of his pride. His pride and his heart was in his money and stuff, a very common affliction for comfortable humans. Jesus has to get this fellow to see his sin, to see his inborn idolatry, to see that no matter what he does, no matter how hard he tries, he will never be good enough for God. Sometimes, God does this to us through trouble, sometimes through plenty, it always changes. God knows the right ways to hit us to drive us to our knees, to show us that we cannot do anything but depend on Him. At the end of the day, all we have is Jesus and what He has done for us. You all know this.

What I challenge you to see is that its not just the end of the day. Right now, as we speak, all you and I have is what Jesus has done for us. In your needs today, your needs for healing or help or patience or whatever it is, you cannot do anything. Let go your need to do anything. Give it to God, and say, God, I cannot let this go. I cannot stop worrying about this, I cannot stop making this an idol, because I need it. As you wake up each day, all you have is Jesus crucified, Jesus risen, Jesus your Savior loving you in the way you need to be loved. Sometimes that means giving you what you want. Sometimes that means taking it away, like Jesus stripped this rich young man of his pride and his inability to see his own sin. Either way, God is your God, and He is giving you what you need. You need Jesus. You need to see that you need Jesus. He gives you both. Whether he is breaking your pride or raising you up again, God is all you have, and all that you need.

Amen.