

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

84th Sunday of Pandemic - Masked Service

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

Psalm 90:12-17

Hebrews 4:12-16

Mark 10:17-31

10/10/2021

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

17As [Jesus] was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” 20He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” 21Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” 22When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. 23Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” 24And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” 26They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?”

27Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” 28Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” 29Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, 30who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. 31But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

The Gospel of Our Lord.

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

### **Discipleship**

Good morning! We begin today with a question: How much would you give up for your faith? As you think about that, here’s a true story. John B lived somewhere in a very small town in Alabama. He was EXTREMELY intelligent, and was very much a big fish in a small pond. He didn’t have many friends, and Tyler was one of the few that he considered to fall into that group. Tyler was what John considered to be the prototypical example of how the system had failed the community, a young man whom the world had given up on. Tyler was also a tattoo artist, which was strange, because John B detested tattoos. Now, when I say he detested them, I’m not exaggerating, his rants were long and frequent on the stupidity of tattoos. So you can imagine how weird it was when John B showed up one day at the tattoo parlor and said he wanted some ink done. He continued to rant about tattoos, but John B just kept showing up periodically for more work.

That was when everything started to click for Tyler and the other owner of the shop. Over time John B had pieced together what their expenses were, how much rent was, how much the utilities cost, and when John B knew that things were getting tough, he would show up and drop hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars on work so that the store could stay open. John B literally sacrificed his skin, with a chest, back, and upper arms all covered with tattoos that his clothing always covered up, all so his friend's shop could stay open. Wow... So again, I ask, what would you give up for your faith?

Our text today is a well known story, the tale of the rich man who asks what he must do for eternal life, and who leaves shocked and grieving when he is told to give up all his possessions. Public opinion has waxed and waned for the rich young man. In the past he was often criticized heavily for his behavior, but recently people have started to cut him a break. After all, the text only says that he leaves in shock, grieving over his many possessions, we don't know what ultimately happens. The story serves as an introduction and starting point for the lesson as a whole. One scholar writes that: *“Mark 10:17-31 is the longest sustained treatment of any ethical issue in the gospel and reflects Jesus’ ethic of radical discipleship... They... express three important approaches to the theme of riches and poverty in the NT: riches as an obstacle to discipleship, God’s preferential option for the poor, and the rewards (present and eschatological) for voluntary poverty undertaken for the sake of God’s kingdom.”*<sup>1</sup>

So while the rich young man may get all the attention, it seems that the focus of the story should really be on us, and the way we respond to

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<sup>1</sup> Donahue, John R., and Daniel J. Harrington. *The Gospel of Mark*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2002. p. 306.

those three themes. After all, stop and think about how being wealthy might look different when we compare the first century to now. If my ancestors saw me sitting in my air-tight house, enjoying the air-conditioning when I'm hot and the central heat when I'm cold, they would be amazed. The luxury of indoor plumbing is astounding, and with the lifting of a handle I can have endlessly clean water brought right to my cup. I have warm water to enjoy whenever I need it, and at any time I can go into my kitchen and open my fridge or pantry for something tasty to eat. We are just as likely now to be tempted by our wealth as the young rich man in our biblical story. In one commentary they write that *"the unspoken assumption is that the rich can become so preoccupied with material goods that these become too important and so distract one from recognizing that God's kingdom is a divine gift often best appreciated by those who are economically poor."*<sup>2</sup> So again I ask, what would you give up for your faith?

Well, maybe you're not preoccupied with money and riches. I would argue that most of us, myself especially, find plenty of things that distract us from having the type of faith that Jesus is calling for in today's story. Whether it be binge watching the latest show on Netflix, playing the latest video game, or consuming the endless videos on YouTube, I find plenty of things to take my focus away from God. For others it might be social media, or some other thing that takes up too much of our time. Regardless of what it is, Jesus tells us to let it go, to give up the power that it has over our lives.

I like to imagine that the rich man went away grieving and sad but after some time he bit the bullet and did get rid of his wealth. Because at the end of the day, my question is all wrong. What would you give up for your faith misses the point, the real question is what distraction are we cutting

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 207.

out so that we can better follow Jesus Christ? In my mind, when the rich young man gives up his wealth, he gains so much more! So stop and think about what's holding you back. Listen to these words from Hebrews and remember that our God waits with open arms for our commitment of faith.

*“12Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. 14Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. 16Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”<sup>3</sup> Amen.*

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<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 4:12-16 NRSV