

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD

Mark 10:23-31

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost (Series B; Proper 24)

October 17, 2021

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The Gospel lesson for the Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 10, verses 23 through 31. It is on page ____/716 of the pew Bible. It picks up with Jesus reflecting on the rich young man, which we heard about last week. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Mark 10, beginning at verse 23, we read in Jesus' name.

²³ And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." ²⁸ Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." ²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

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

I've changed a little bit since I started ministry. Six years ago, I would have never said what I am about to say. I thought it, but I didn't consider it my place to say. Eventually I was corrected by someone to understand that everything that is part of the Christian life is not just the pastor's place to say, but it is the pastor's responsibility to say. So for a few minutes here, I'm going to talk about something that I don't think I've ever talked about with you, at least not so plainly. If you're a visitor, that's my disclaimer. This is not our subject of conversation every Sunday. If you come again, you'll hear something else. But this is part of our Christian life, and the text we just read deals with it, so we need to hear it and accept it.

Offerings are a necessary part of the Christian life. If you are a Christian, you should give. We give to our local congregation. We give for missionary purposes. And we give to those in need. It is a necessary part of the Christian life.

Now I don't mean that you can't go to heaven if you don't put money in the offering plate. We don't say that about any good works. Good works are not necessary for salvation. But good works are necessary. That is, God commands them of his children. And God gives us freedom to give, knowing that he is our gracious heavenly Father. When we give, we return what really belongs to him, and we trust that he will continue to care for us. This is part of the Christian life.

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD (Mark 10:23-31)

I suppose we get squeamish whenever pastors talk about offering. One reason for this is because we've seen some really bad actors in this regard, like when celebrity pastors raise money for private jets. The other reason is that money is one of our gods. And we don't like it when the one true God attacks our false gods. But this is part of the Christian life. And Jesus said, **"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"** (Matt. 6:21; Luke 12:34). Giving helps orient our hearts and minds to the things we should love.

Now, there's no set amount to give. It's not a flat tax for church membership. There isn't a percentage either. I try not to even use the word "tithe" anymore, because a tithe is a ten percent offering. That was an old covenant concept, and it doesn't apply in the new covenant. The new covenant principle is that "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).

You decide what you want to give. It might be ten percent. It might be one percent, but it should not be zero, because you can't really give zero of anything. The only exception is if you can't give anything. And that might be your situation, in which case the church should be supporting you. Christians give, and Christians receive, but nobody should sit on the sidelines. And if you are a member of this congregation, and you need to receive, you should absolutely let us know, so that we can give to you. You can talk to me or one of the deacons. We have funds for that. And if we need to get more, we know how to do that. Our Lord Jesus said, **"It is more blessed to give than to receive"** (Acts 20:35). If you keep your need to yourself, you are robbing the rest of us of a blessing. Do not do that.

There's a lot more I would like to say. And you might have a lot of questions. Come to Sunday school. But I'll hit a few things quickly.

First, we give in many different ways. It's not just financial, but we also give our time, expertise, service, and especially prayers.

Second, I don't know what any of you give. Some pastors do look at that info. And there can be a pastoral benefit in knowing. But for me, once I see something, I can't un-see it, so I don't know what anyone gives.

Third, how much you give does not affect my compensation. I suppose if people quit giving, eventually it would, and that would be okay. I mention this, because I didn't understand this when I was growing up. Many of you know I grew up as a pastor's kid. And whenever Christmas or my birthday was coming up, I kind of looked around the sanctuary during the offering, and once or twice I maybe even tried to look sad or poor, because I thought if people gave more, than my dad could buy me what I really wanted.

Fourth, our congregation is not in financial trouble. The council did not ask me to preach this sermon. I won't tell you here what our financial state is, but members should make it their business to know.

Finally, if members give, we might have a surplus. It's wise to keep a certain amount in savings. But it's poor stewardship for a congregation to keep a lot in savings. It's not like we're saving for retirement. Members should discuss how much to keep in savings and what to do when we have a surplus. Our annual meeting is coming up in a few months. Whether you give a lot or a little or even receive support from the church, every member has an equal voice. Don't just give. That's lazy. Come to the annual meeting and help decide what we will do with what we have.

I've heard the opinion that the Church should not give to other organizations. Members should each give to those organizations they care about. And there's some virtue to this. You

should give to those organizations that you believe are doing good work. But the local congregation should also give, especially to missions or the other works of our church body, like our schools or publishing house. We can also give to local charities that help the poor in our community. There are certain benefits of giving together. When we give together, it lets us all see what we are doing together, and we have unity in that work. It also makes it clear that we are giving in the name of Jesus Christ. When you give directly to someone or something, that looks like a gift from you, and that's fine. But when we give together as a congregation, the recipient more clearly sees it as a gift in Jesus' name.

Enough business. If you have questions, comments, or objections, come to Sunday school.

Let's consider what our Lord Jesus teaches in this passage. This passage is very much connected with the gospel reading from last week. Jesus attacks our worship of money. It's one of our favorite false gods. We fear, love, and trust in it instead of the one true God. And the basic problem with this idolatry is that money is simply not capable of saving us. That's Jesus' big concern. Yes, he cares about the poor. But poverty is a temporal issue. Jesus is most concerned with eternal issues. And the eternal issue is that the love of money can draw our hearts away from the one true God, so that we neglect the salvation he gives us and perish for all eternity.

In last week's reading, Jesus had an encounter with a rich man, who, by all outward appearances, was a good guy. But he loved his possessions, and it drew his heart away from the one true God. The reading for today picks up with Jesus reflecting on this with his disciples. He says, **"How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"** (10:23). And the disciples were amazed. Apparently, they were so amazed that they didn't say anything, or at least not anything worth recording. So Jesus continues, **"Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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."** (10:24-25). Then they go from amazed to "exceedingly astonished," and they asked, "Then who can be saved? (10:26).

This question is interesting. We might expect them to say something like, "So all rich people are going to hell? That sounds kind of harsh." But they ask something else. They say, "Then who can be saved?"

At that point in history, the Jews believed that prosperity was a sign of God's favor. If a person is rich, God must be pleased with them. And if a person is poor, or if a person is suffering physically, they must have committed some sin that God is punishing them for. This shows up in the passage where Jesus heals a man born blind. The disciples asked him, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). Jesus has to correct them. God was not punishing anyone. But at that time in history, the Jews believed that being healthy and wealthy was a sign of God's favor. So here, when they ask Jesus, "Then who can be saved?" their thought is that if it's difficult for a rich person to be saved, us common folk will be lost for sure.

They saw wealth as a sign of God's favor. And this might sound kind of familiar, because we have plenty of it around today in the prosperity churches. And we might reject their errors. We should. But we are naturally tempted toward the same error. It's part of natural religion. Natural religion is the inborn sense we all have that we are rewarded for the good things we do and punished for the bad. That's natural religion, and we all have it.

Sometimes we reverse engineer this. That is, something good happens to us, and we conclude that we must have done something good that God is rewarding us for. Or something bad happens, and we conclude that we must have sinned in some way for God to punish us. And we

apply this to other people. We see prosperous people around us, and we think they must be better than us, because they are rewarded more than we are.

Jesus' disciples thought this way when they said, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus had made salvation seem very difficult. "How difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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." So the disciples reach the point of exceeding astonishment, and Jesus dials it up to say that it's not just difficult; it's impossible! "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." (10:27).

Perhaps you've heard that verse before. "All things are possible with God." It's an easy motto to remember, and it rings true. We can apply it to anything. But pay special attention to how Jesus applies. Jesus applies it to your salvation. That is, he applies it to the issue of your eternal life. You being saved is the impossible thing that God does.

Do you think you're a good person? Good enough for God to reward you with eternal life? We might say, "Maybe. I mean, I'm not the best person in the world, but I'm certainly not the worst." Is that how we think? Now think of the best person you know. What's the possibility of that person being saved? According to Jesus, it's zero, that is, if it depends on them. What is the possibility of you being saved? Or me being saved? According to Jesus, it's zero, that is, if it depends on us. But "all things are possible with God."

With God there is forgiveness. He forgives the impossible. He loves the impossible. He turns the impossible heart away from the vain gods we worship.

You might look at your life and think it's impossible that God could love you or forgive you. You think of the things you've done, or even the things that have been done to you. Who would want that? Who could forgive that? Who could love a mess like me? "All things are possible with God." His love is something we never would have guessed. This impossible love is what took him to the cross. Consider the cross. And I mean the real cross, not the empty crosses we hang up or wear around our necks. I mean the real one, with the real God-man bleeding and dying on it. Mockers shouted at him as they walked by. He endured pain and shame. Darkness came over the land as the wrath of God was poured out on Jesus. Why would Jesus, being perfect and righteous, endure such shame for rebellious creatures like you and me? Why would he do that for vain money lovers like us? This is the impossible love of God. We don't even want it. We would rather have mansions, cars, boats, fancy clothes, or whatever else money can get for us. We seek those gods, and those gods fail us. And while we are chasing those other gods, the one true God goes and does the one thing necessary to save us. He bleeds and suffers and dies for us. This is the impossible love of Jesus. He loves the impossible. He forgives the impossible.

He even turns the impossible heart. It's really impossible that we would hear about this bleeding and dying man and find our hope in that. Everywhere we look, our eyes desire the treasures of the world. And I don't know what you want. Whatever it is, you love it. You long for it. You feel like it will satisfy you. But it's a vain promise. It cannot save your soul. It does not love you. It cannot fill the need of God in your life. But it's really impossible to turn away from this. We're talking about turning away from something we see. We see the rich prosper, and they seem happy. They seem respectable. We're talking about turning away from the things that seem to be working for them to trust in Jesus, a bleeding, rejected, and condemned criminal that we do not even see, but only hear about. It's really impossible for our hearts to desire Jesus instead. But "all things are possible with God."

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD (Mark 10:23-31)

The Small Catechism teaches us to confess, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith.” **“All things are possible with God.”** Faith is a miracle.

And, you know, there is a wealth that comes with being a Christian. It’s just different than the wealth our sinful nature desires. Peter reminds Jesus that they have left everything and followed him (10:28). It’s a little bit braggy, but Jesus doesn’t rebuke him, at least not too much. Instead, Jesus assures him that whoever has given up houses, family, or lands will receive a return of a hundred times as much, even in this life, not to mention eternal life in the age to come (10:29-30).

It’s a bit of a hard saying, because the math doesn’t seem to work out. Your bank account doesn’t multiply by a hundred when you drop a check in the offering plate. It’s also a hard saying, because Jesus slips in a line about persecutions that kind of seems out of place. But that’s the reality. We often experience persecutions for following Jesus. Many Christians face severe persecution. But receiving a hundred fold for whatever we give up, that’s something we don’t experience.

The key is how Jesus addresses his disciples a few verses earlier. He calls them children. And who are we children of? We are children of our almighty heavenly Father, who created the universe and everything in it. Even if we face extreme persecution and lose everything we own, we are children of the one true God who possesses everything in heaven and earth.

So think about children. What do children own? In one sense, they own very little. They have shoes, some clothes, and a few toys. But their parents take their toys away whenever they’re naughty, so you might question if they really own those. In one sense, children own very little. But in another sense, they really own everything their parents have, because everything their parents have exists to serve them.

The other day our son said of our Subaru, “Daddy, what are you doing in my car?” I said, “What do you mean *your* car? My name’s on the paper.” But, you know, he and his sister are the reason we bought it. When you’re a child, you don’t really own anything by yourself, but you do own everything that belongs to your parents. They just decide when you can have it and how you can use it. And, of course, they do this for your good.

Now, again, who are we children of? Our Father in heaven. And does your heavenly Father use what he possesses to care for you? Of course. That’s the whole point of his possessions. Like a good parent, he does not give us all the world at once. We would destroy ourselves. But as his children, everything we have really belongs to him, and everything he has is ours, because he uses it for our good.

We talk a lot about eternal life, and rightly so. Eternal life is more important than this life. But this life is still important. And God cares about it. Your heavenly Father cares for you in this life too. Part of the freedom and joy and security of being a Christian is knowing that we have a heavenly Father who cares for us. He knows how many Cheerios are in your cupboard. He knows how many miles are on your car. He knows what your thermostat is set at in the winter. He knows. He cares. And he acts.

“All things are possible with God.” But we don’t just think about what he can do. Just because God can do something, doesn’t mean he will. Instead, we think about what he has promised to do. **“All things are possible with God,”** assures us that he is capable of keeping his

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD (Mark 10:23-31)

promises. Can he care for all of our bodily needs? Absolutely. And he does. Can he forgive his rebellious creatures who turn away from him every time we see something shiny? He can, and he does. Jesus has already been crucified for these sins. Can he love you regardless of what you have done and what you have been through? There is no doubt. Can he preserve you in the faith and guard you until eternal life? Yes. And he does. The Holy Spirit is constantly active to guard your faith. **“All things are possible with God,”** especially your eternal salvation. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.