

SERMON FOR OCTOBER 21, 2018

TEXT: MARK 10:23-31

THEME: THE QUEST TO BE NUMBER ONE

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."

In the name of Jesus:

Americans have a fascination with lists on who or what is number one.

Sports writers regularly publish lists on which team is ranked number one.

Magazines such as Columbus Monthly will ask its readers to rank which business is the best at what it does, and then publishes the list for all to see. When traveling, travelers will search web sites such as Trip Advisor or Yelp to get recommendations as to what is the best place to eat in the area. In an election year, what candidate wants to finish second in an election? Every candidate wants to come out on top, to be considered number one. And Forbes magazine has recently come out with their yearly list, the list of richest people in American. We as Americans are fascinated with lists, including lists that speak to who are number one in any area of life.

But with Jesus, He turns this fascination with being number one on its head.

Note what He says in the last verse of our Gospel lesson for today: "Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first." Jesus isn't concerned about who is

considered to be the best in whatever poll is being conducted. What Jesus wants is to be number one in your life.

Our text for today actually picks up on the same theme that we saw last week in the Gospel of Mark. Last week, Jesus spoke with a rich young man. He sought out Jesus and asked Jesus about eternal life. He called Jesus a Good Teacher, but Jesus responded with the question: "Why do you call Me good, for no one is good but God alone." Jesus truly is good, for He is God's only Son. And so Jesus tells the young man to sell all He has, give it to the poor, and follow Him. The rich young man goes away saddened, because it wasn't the answer he was hoping for.

Today Jesus continues that thought in our text, by confronting His disciples and saying: "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples are floored by Jesus' words. So Jesus says 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." By now the disciples are exasperated, and cried out to Jesus: "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."

You see, it is utterly impossible for anyone, including you and me, to enter the Kingdom of God by ourselves, by our own efforts, trusting in our good works, our good intentions, our own goodness. The saying money can't buy happiness is true. It is also true that money can't buy God's love.

Just listen to what Solomon writes in the Old Testament lesson today: "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his

income; this also is vanity. ¹¹ When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?¹² Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.” Note what God is saying here through the wise man, Solomon. It is a timeless truth, a truth that was true in Solomon’s day, and it is true today as well. As wealth increases, the desire for more wealth increases. If we desire more wealth, the more wealth we have will never satisfy our desire. If wealth or money is our measuring stick on how we view ourselves, or if power or prestige is our measuring stick on how we view ourselves we will never measure up. God is not impressed with the amount of money we have, or the power we possess, or the title we carry. For God knows that what we have we will always desire more. What God desires is to show mercy to those in need. God is not impressed with what you have; rather God wants you to receive what He wants to give to you. What God desires is a relationship with you. He wants your heart; He desires to be number one in your life.

But each of us has other desires that get in the way of our relationship with God, that quite honestly, take the place of God in our lives. There are times in our life that God is not just that important. God demands that we love Him with all of our being but we love God half-heartedly. God demands that each of us live a perfect life yet that is impossible. Just like the disciple we cry out, “who then can be saved? And Jesus says that with God all things are possible. All things are possible, and all can be saved, indeed salvation is for everyone, for God has determined that you are number one in His eyes.

God doesn't look at wealth to determine whether or not someone becomes His child. God makes sinners His own because God does the choosing. Even though you and I don't deserve to be called God's child, God has determined that we would become His children, and He has done the choosing in His Son Jesus Christ.

The Bible says that God wants all to be saved and come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. Just like in the Old Testament times, God does the choosing. The prophet Moses reminded God's people in the Old Testament that there were God's people, not by right, not because of anything that they had done, but God chose them because God loved them. Moses said: "7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the Lord loves you (and this is the reason) that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations."

God has done the same for you! The same God who chose Israel to follow Him has chosen you to be His child. How and when did God do this? God chose to save us, not by what we could do or what we can do, but He chose to save us by a free gift of His grace. For by grace you have been saved through faith in Christ, this is a gift of God, it isn't anything that you have done. He has chosen you in the waters of your Baptism and has called you by name, you belong to Him because Jesus has purchased and won you from sin, death, and the Devil. He did this not by spending money on you but instead He came down from heaven, lived His life for

you and died the death that you deserve, all so that God would be merciful to you and save you. You belong to God, all on account of Jesus.

This is why the Bible says to look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. It was pure joy and love that drove Jesus from heaven, to be your Savior. What He did for you He did because He loved you. And what He does for you today, to forgive you, to take care of you, to listen to your prayer and to answer your prayers, to be your ever present help in all of your troubles, He does out of love.

The salvation that is yours is not only for you, but it is for all people. God has made it possible for everyone to be saved, for God has made it known that God's free gift for you and me and everyone is that eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. By God's grace through faith in Jesus all people can be saved, regardless of one's social status, wealth, power, race, language, or any other marker of division one may choose. Through Jesus Christ everyone can come to God the Father. Through Jesus Christ all can be saved and be a part of the Kingdom of God.

That is why God calls us to live differently. We are called to live as servants of the King, King Jesus. Jesus gives to you in Baptism, the Word, and the Lord's Supper His Holy Spirit, so that you can live for God. Be holy as I the Lord your God am holy. That means that we are called by God to live differently than the rest of the world.

All too often our good intentions get in the way of our actually living out our faith. Our lives are filled with good intentions and broken promises. Just as Jesus

came to do the will of Him who sent Him, today Jesus invites you to live according to His will. He reminds that you can't serve God and money. Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also. Jesus says: ³⁸for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. and that the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many."

As Jesus served you in His life, now go and serve others in your life. As you live for Him, you live your life for others, in love. The Bible says: ¹⁴and we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷By this is love perfected with us, because as he is so also are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. ¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

The Lord gives to us and to His Church a command, a mission, and a commission so that we go forward as individual Christians and as His Church with the purpose of living for Jesus and sharing His love. This is what Jesus said before He ascended into heaven: Our task is to go forth and live as His disciples, seeking to make disciples or followers of Jesus. This is not our work; it is God's working in and through us.

God doesn't give us a program to follow to do this. He simply tells us to go out and live our lives to His glory. This is what the early disciples did, as they devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer." These early Christians devoted themselves to worshipping God on the Sabbath, to going to the Lord's Supper, and to faithfully and fervently praying to God, the Lord of the harvest, to bring people to a saving faith in Jesus. It was no secret, no magic trick, and just God's people taking God at His Word and living out their faith in Jesus. And in doing so the Lord added to their number daily those who were saved.

Jesus invites each of us to follow Him. To do so means that each of us needs to put Christ first in our lives. Jesus says that if anyone wants to follow Him, let Him deny himself, take up the cross, and follow Jesus. To deny yourself means that we repent of our sins daily and look to Jesus for forgiveness. To take up the cross means that we take Jesus with us wherever we go, in the joys but also in the trials and tribulations of life, being faithful to Him. And to follow Jesus means that we are devoted to Jesus, not just on Sunday, but everyday, seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness.

In a world that places a premium on being number one, God reminds you and me that Jesus saved us so that we can live for Him. So live as His child, share the love of Christ with all, and show your love for God by loving those around you. In Jesus' name. Amen