

St. Peter Lutheran Church, Doss, TX 10-10-21 Sacrifice or Walk Away

*Mark 10: 17-31 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard 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 man to enter the kingdom of God." The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."*

What's wrong with this picture? First in our Gospel, there is a man who is basically a good person. He is interested in eternal life with God. Jesus asks him how he is doing in his spiritual walk. He tells him the truth about himself- he has indeed followed the commandments. But Jesus picks up something about the man – his first love. There are seven churches at the beginning of the book of Revelation. One of them, Jesus chastises for losing their first love. We see that in the first commandment – You shall have no other gods before Me. The positive of that is to love the Lord with all your heart soul, mind and strength. One thing you lack, Jesus says. Sell what you have, give it to the poor and come

follow me. In Peterson's paraphrase, this is what follows next: *He walked off with a heavy heart. He was holding on tight to a lot of things and not about to let go.*

The Reformation begun by God through Martin Luther reminds us that we are saved by grace through faith for God to use in service, sacrificially living and founded, supported and guided by the Gospel, by God's Word. Today's Gospel looks at a Christian's life of sacrifice, an unpopular word in today's world. But it is a topic of stewardship when it comes to managing our response to life around us.

The world around us is not only disinterested in God, but many are opposed. It's almost as if they pretend He doesn't exist. They live busy lives in which there is no room for Him. It's tempting to join those who ignore the spiritual side of life altogether. We do applaud sacrifice by others. There's something nostalgic about sacrifice. We praise those who go beyond the call of duty and risk their lives to save another from a drowning or a house fire or trying to rescue people from Afghanistan.

Jesus' question to the man is a question of priority. What's first in your life? God claims that first place for you as a Christian. We are each called to relate to Him as our Father, as our Savior, as our Friend. Then, we are called to be a husband or wife, a parent or a child, a Christian and a Lutheran, a person with a vocation or work calling, and an American. You are called to be human and that means in relationship to our Creator, Who made us, saved us, has a plan for us, and equips us for that plan. We have this stewardship as well – our relationship with God. The scriptures say, God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8) That death was a sacrifice, a way to live out the expression of loving another. Jesus told the disciples who were surprised at what they just saw with the young ruler walking away, in the words of a paraphrase, *“Do you have any idea how difficult it is for people who ‘have it all’ to enter God’s Kingdom?”* The paraphrase goes on: *The disciples couldn't believe what they were hearing, but Jesus kept on, 'You can't imagine how difficult. I'd say it's easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for the rich to get into God's Kingdom. That set the disciples back on their heels. 'Then who has any chance at all?' they asked. Jesus was blunt, 'No chance at all if you think you can pull it off by yourself. Every chance in the world if you let God do*

*it.* ' "Think again of the young upwardly mobile leader who 'walked off with a heavy heart, holding on tight to a lot of things and not about to let go.' Are we amazed with the disciples? They were all on the poor side except maybe Matthew.

Let's say your favorite movie star was asked about faith in Jesus and said he really didn't need Jesus or anyone else, that he had it all as far as he was concerned. What would your response be as one who loves and serves Jesus Christ? Would there be some shock, disappointment, and sadness? Here comes a guy who is really cool, who has it all together. He is a religious man and is trying to please God. He gives his offerings and follows the commandments. And Jesus says, "One thing you lack..." ...We are Lutheran Christians, saved by grace, God's grace. It's like the hymn, 'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.' We cannot earn our relationship or our peace with God. It was won by Christ on the cross since we are all sinners. Jesus was looking at where the rich young man placed his faith. He was religiously active, worshipping, alms giving, and probably took Hebrew school classes. But his first love wasn't the God of our salvation. There is no sacrifice another man wouldn't make to buy the field with the pearl buried in it. He sold everything to get the pearl of great price. Nothing should stand in our way of loving our Lord as the most important person in our lives and sometimes that makes for difficult decisions and some of those result in sacrifice. Sacrifice means having to give up something for someone else or for a greater good. We give up time to help a friend, to pray and praise, to listen to a family member who needs understanding, bring food for the food bank, money for the mission of the church, and various projects from which we may not get direct benefit. And Jesus says, "One thing you lack..." to the prosperous young man. What does he say to you? We are all different, with different levels of commitment, different talents, different treasures.

We are challenged to consider if there is anything that gets in the way of God being our first love. Love of family can get stretched but remember God called you into a family and when we as families do His will, we are still family and His brothers and sisters and mother.

In the disciple's amazement, they ask, 'Who then can be saved?' Or as the paraphrase puts it, "who has any chance at all?" Jesus points them to God for Whom nothing is

impossible. He reminds us that human beings can't resolve this problem – only God. Peter points out that they have left everything and followed him. They have made sacrifices. Jesus says in the paraphrase, *'Mark my words, no one who sacrifices house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, land -whatever- because of me and the gospel will lose out. They'll get it all back, multiplied many times in homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and land – but also in troubles...and then eternal life.'* Jesus is saying: for all the sacrifice, made in love and by faith, you'll be surprised beyond human understanding. Some things are worth dying for. Jesus is worth dying for... and living for. Christy Nichols in her song, *May the Words of my Mouth* points us to what Jesus would like to have heard from the rich young ruler.

1) May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart bless Your name, bless Your name, Jesus, and the deeds of the day and the truth in my way speak of You, speak of You, Jesus.

Refrain: This is what I'm glad to do. It's time to live a life of love that pleases You.

And I will give my all to You, surrender everything I have and follow You. I'll follow You.

2) Lord, be my vision; Lord, be my guide. Be my hope, be my life, and the Way.

And I'll look not for riches, nor praises on earth. Only You'll be the first in my heart.

The refrain says: And I will give my all to You; surrender everything I have and follow You.

Sacrifice... As we look at our stewardship, let us ask ourselves: where is sacrifice in our lives? If it feels like duty, look to the Master, ask for forgiveness. If the joy isn't there, ask yourself whether you are accepting God's will and trusting him with the present and future as well as helping you deal with the past. It takes courage to honestly answer the questions that Jesus asked. May God bless you with that courage. Amen