

October 25 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 34:1-8

Hebrews 7:23-28

Mark 10:17-30, p. 923

Sermon *Mission Possible!*

In Lewis Carroll's fanciful tale, "*Through the Looking Glass*" Alice has a nonsensical conversation with the queen. "I can't believe that" said Alice "Can't" said the queen in a pitying tone, "Well, try again, draw a long breathe and close your eyes." Alice laughed, "There is no use in trying," she said, "Once one can't believe in impossible things." "I dare say you haven't had much practice then," said the queen. "Why when I was your age I always did it for half an hour a day at least, why sometimes I believe, as many as six impossible things even before breakfast."

The disciples in today's gospel lesson are asked to believe something nigh as impossible whether it was to or after breakfast doesn't make any difference. What does make a difference is their amazement over the encounter between Jesus and the man whom Mark tell us has great, great wealth. Now don't get me wrong this is a good man; who earnestly desires to know how he might inherit eternal life. When confronted with the commandments even though he is not asked by Jesus whether or not if he has conformed his life after them; the man volunteered that he had kept at least the partial list that Jesus mentioned to him. As you read into the story I might suggest that this man had problems with a different commandment and with a different god rather than the God of all creation being the God of his life. When Jesus suggested that he ought to sell all of his goods and then and give it to the poor, Mark reports that his face fell. He went away sad because he had great, great wealth; his trust was ultimately in money and his possessions. But this was still a good man. He is the kind of man that any community would love to have. He would work hard on committees. He would be in church every Sunday with a well scrubbed family. He probably would give generously to his synagogue and other kinds of charitable organizations of that day but not really enough to seriously dent his wallet. He was a good man but he did not rise to two of Jesus most famous sayings-How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God and that really strange one, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle for a rich man to come into the kingdom of heaven. You know this is precisely where the disciples' mind parted company with their heart, "Jesus," they might have said to him, "do you know to whom you are speaking?" This is a man whose faith out shines every other person in the synagogue. We prayed that we might be

able to follow the commandments like this man follows the commandments. Jesus if this man cannot get into heaven, then who can get in?" In your mind's eye you can kind of imagine Jesus shaking his head and with a little grin on his face. Don't they understand yet? And you might recall the discussion from a couple of weeks ago that just prior to this incident the disciples had prevented children from coming to Jesus. Jesus was unhappy and he told the disciples to let those children come. He went so far as to say that it was the children that belonged in the kingdom of heaven or people who are like children. And that means receiving life like a gift; like a pure gift with no strings attached.

Immediately afterwards this adult of whom we have been speaking, this very mature, very proper man explains his qualifications for God's kingdom. He said from his youth he has obeyed the commandments, and maybe if Jesus would have interrupted him right there maybe Jesus would have said, "Sir, I think you should have stayed in your youth. You have become so responsible and with the cares of this world that you have forgotten how to receive something in life joyfully and without any merit whatsoever.

Why, I wonder what the children do to earn such lofty place in Jesus heart? I think because they came with enthusiasm. They came with open hearts. I think they came with trust. They came with hope. , they came with faith. They put nothing ahead of Jesus in their lives; not money, not sports, not even X-Box, not the national foot ball league; not even golf for Pete's sake. At this point we all might become worried. Most of us who are older than ten or twelve have lost our childhood innocence and incorporated more and more what we would call commonsense into our lives. If we were like the man standing in front of Jesus, he might or might not hook us on the subject of money. I believe if we were to hold up any of our hearts to the light there would be spots on our spiritual x-rays that would indicate a foreign god in the place where there should be no other gods other than the God of the universe.

You know by almost any standard many of us sitting here the seats today and standing in this pulpit as well are the wealthiest people in the world. What we call the necessities of life are precious and are luxuries in the developing world. We take so much for granted water, the food, the heat, the education, even trash pickup, and then we even have automobiles and then we have those new necessities -smart phones, maybe a swimming pool, maybe a trip to a far place, maybe a meal out once or twice a week. So when we hear this text from Mark I expect we think, Wow this text doesn't apply to me but boy are the Rockefellers' in trouble and some of those people for sure, but the truth is that you and I need to do some seriously consideration of our relationships of our wealth and God as well. Jesus said it would be hard for a rich man or woman to enter the kingdom of God and indeed it will but it will also be hard for those of us who love food or

alcohol way too much or for those of us who love leisure in excess in contrast of our love for God. Or for those of us whose career is preeminent in our lives or those of us who live in fear in some imagined danger or those of us who want to hang on to those cherish hurts and bitterness in life and the list can go on and on.

But Pastor Russ these are good people about whom you are speaking and we can hear the echo of those disciples of Jesus. These are the people who make up our church. These are the people who make up our communities. We have been trying to pattern our lives after them, if they can't enter the kingdom then who can enter the kingdom? Jesus answer will be the innocence children of the world. The second answer might be more comforting, while it is impossible for us to earn the kingdom by our obedience to the commandment or prescribed way of life even with God even those things which we thought are impossible are possible even for the wealthy man.

Jesus came to this world to help us see our role as children of God. God offers us a gift without any parallel. He came that we might have life and have that life abundantly, unfettered by wealth, unfettered by possessions, unfettered by fears, unfettered by bitterness. He came to make us children. Jesus came to do the impossible something no fountain of youth could ever do. Jesus will change us into children and we will receive a gift that we cannot earn. Does that sound impossible? Try this on for size, with God all things are possible. Even you and I can become children again in our lives and so as the queen said "why sometimes I believe six impossible things before breakfast." In the Christian faith we are asked to believe some impossible things, too. At least impossible from our mortal vantage point but believe this before breakfast, before dinner before lunch we are loved and we are included as children of God through a gift; a gift which is pure; a gift which is simple. You know I have observed over the years and you know as well it as I do Christians can be a difficult, stiff necked stubborn lot of people but with God all things are possible
And together we say Amen.