

**Pentecost 19 – Proper 23B (10/11/09 – *Treasure in Heaven*)**

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

A rich young man comes to Jesus. He is confused about life – though he doesn't realize it. In fact, he probably believes quite the opposite ... that he has life by the horns – since he is quite rich in the things of the world. First, he calls Jesus *good* – which Jesus surely *is*. But from our Savior's response, it is clear that this young man doesn't really know Who Jesus is ... or why Jesus is good. *Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.* [MK 10.18] Of course, we know that Jesus *is* God ... and therefore also good ... **really** good ... **perfectly** good – unlike this man ... unlike **us**.

Next, the young man asks Jesus a question – one that may seem proper on the surface, but a question that reveals a fundamental problem in this man's thinking about God and the things of God ... especially heaven: *Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?* [10.17] If this didn't have to do with matters spiritual ... and eternal – with *eternal life* – we might find the irony amusing; but this rich young man's lack of understanding betrays his own lack of possession of eternal life ... and that is no laughing matter. *What must I DO to INHERIT?* Who ever heard of such a thing? This young man doesn't seem to understand how worldly inheritance works – much less how one inherits eternal life?

Or if he **does** understand how worldly inheritance works, does he think that inheriting the kingdom of God works in a radically different way? It brings to mind St. Paul's words to the churches of Galatia: *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?* [GAL 3.1-3] To put it in terms of our present Gospel text: *Having been placed into the kingdom of God by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit through the Word and the Sacraments, are you now going to try to do and work and earn the inheritance of eternal life?*

So, after directing the young man to the only true good ... namely God – and, therefore, ultimately to Himself ... God in the flesh – Jesus tries to help this man see the folly of his question and approach to eternal life. *You know*

*the commandments* [10.19] and then our Lord proceeds to enumerate what we call the Second Table of the Law ... the commandments that have to do with loving our neighbors as ourselves. ***Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.*** These are basically commandments 4–10; although for some reason our Lord places the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment – honoring father and mother – last ... perhaps for emphasis (since it seems that rather often rich young people lack respect for parents and other authorities). Now we begin to see his problem – and our own: ***Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.*** [10.20]

I suppose Jesus could have laughed at him. *You don't really think you've kept the Second Table of God's holy Law perfectly, do you? If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* [1JN 1.8] Our Lord could have blasted this young man with the Law – in fact, with specific sins he had committed ... since our Lord knew very well every act, syllable, and fleeting thought of his life. I suppose Jesus could have been angry with him – the just wrath of God against sin and unbelief. But He didn't – remember that! ... we will speak of it later. Instead, our text says: ***And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."*** [10.21] A hard task, this – selling all we have and giving it away to those who haven't earned it. It grates terribly against our flesh – our proud, “theology of glory” flesh that likes to think it has earned everything it's gotten ... including those things that have to do with spiritual ... lasting ... heavenly ... eternal life. But now we see the crux of this rich young man's problem – the sin problem that is keeping him out of heaven. He hasn't kept the **First** Commandment – the First Table of the Law ... fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things; how can he have kept the Second Table perfectly “from his youth”?

And you? What one thing would our Lord set before you – not evil in itself ... but that draws you away from God ... gets in your way of loving Him more than all else ... causes to neglect calling on His Name ... makes you forego the preaching and the Word of God? Would it be your house ... your car ... your hobby ... your career ... your books (i.e., your learning/intelligence)? Go, sell it ... give it away ... and come, follow Christ.

*Lord Jesus Christ, Whose grace always precedes and follows us, help us to forsake all trust in earthly gain and to find in You our heavenly treasure.* The answer to the question – **Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?** – isn't an action on our part at all ... but simply being who God graciously has made us to be in Christ ... namely, His dearly loved, forgiven **children**. Even the world gets this right – one inherits by the grace of the benefactor ... most often simply because s/he is a beloved member of the family. And what do you **do** to achieve that status? You are born ... or adopted – that's it. It wasn't anything **you** do at all ... but what God does ... by placing you into that family.

So is it in the kingdom of God. You inherit eternal life – heaven ... and all of God's eternal benefits – simply because God has made you His child by adopting you through Baptism and faith. You cannot earn that status – God gives it to you ... because He loves you. You cannot work to get it ... or retain it – it is your inheritance ... because of Christ, Who has made Himself your Brother by His incarnation ... and your Savior by His life and death and resurrection. God gives it to you because He loves you – with an unchanging, inexhaustible, everlasting love.

That is why, when the rich young man very mistakenly said that he had kept all of God's Law from his youth, our text says: **And Jesus, looking at him, loved him.** [10.21] Despite his sinful pride, Jesus loved him ... just like He loves you despite your sin. Indeed, it is because of this great love for all of us, despite our sin, that Jesus came to be the Fulfiller of the Law. Just as it is because of this great love for you that Jesus directs you to your sin – in order that you might repent of any “worthiness” you may think you find in yourself, and instead find all your worthiness in Christ your dear Lord, Who alone (with the Father and the Holy Spirit) is truly good ... and truly holy ... and truly righteous.

God's goodness ... and God's love – that is the basis for your status before Him ... that is the basis for your inheritance in heaven. You may have missed a little something at the very beginning of our *Holy Gospel* that specifically points to Christ's goodness and love for you. What is often called a “travel notice” in commentaries. The very first verse of our Gospel reads: **And as He [Jesus] was setting out on His journey, a man ran up and knelt before Him and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to**

*inherit eternal life?"* To rightly understand this – to fully understand the implications – we need to step back just a bit and see where we have been with our Lord over the past several weeks. First we had our Lord's *Feeding of the Five Thousand* – in which we are told that Jesus looked out upon the multitudes gathered to hear Him preach and ***had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd*** [MK 7.34]. In a similar incident (the *Feeding of the Four Thousand*) we read: ***I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with Me now three days and have nothing to eat.*** [MK 8.2] In the next chapter [9.2-13] is *The Transfiguration of Our Lord* ... and as Jesus and the three Apostles come down the mountainside, Jesus ***charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead*** [9.9]. As our Lord descends down the mountain, He is beginning His journey toward the Cross.

After the healing of the demon-possessed boy, our Savior again foretells His death and resurrection. And in the context of an argument by the disciples about who is the greatest, our Lord's says: ***If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all*** [MK 9.35]. At this point Luke notes that Jesus ***set His face to go to Jerusalem*** [LK 9.51]. Our Lord is intent on going to His crucifixion – making Himself ***Last of all and Servant of all*** ... the ultimate show of His loving obedience to the Father's will ... His subjection under the Law ... His goodness and His love ... **all for you!** He will not only kept all the commandments from His youth ... perfectly, but will do so for **your** benefit ... such that it is accounted **to you** by grace through faith for righteousness. **Christ will do** what must be done **for you** to ***inherit eternal life***. And all that is left for **you** to receive the inheritance is to hearken to Moses' command to Israel as they stood before the Red Sea with the enemy in hot pursuit: ***Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you today.*** [EXO 14.13]

One last thing. Note that Christ says: ***you will have treasure in heaven, and come, FOLLOW Me*** [MK 10.21]. In goodness and love your Savior always goes ahead of you – through rejection ... suffering ... even death and the grave ... and all the way to heaven. In goodness and love He has gone through all that in order that He might go and prepare a place for you, that where He is, there you may be also ... for life eternal.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]