Mark 10:26-27 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.”

As you heard our Gospel reading today, did you happen to see and wonder about something I did? As soon as I read this text, I immediately had a question pop into my head and I think it is a question worth considering not only as it pertains to this text but especially as it pertains to the lesson of this text. I say that because this text is teaching a wonderful lesson but if you are not careful you will think this text is only teaching a lesson about being rich and getting into heaven. You would be wrong and you would then miss the whole point of what is being taught.

So what is the question that popped into my head? It is this: “Why does this young man ask, **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”**

Let me tell you why I think this question important. First, every indication is that this young man was Jewish, more than that, that this young man was also deeply religious. This young man considered himself so pious, that when confronted with the basics of the Law of God he says, **“All these I have kept since I was a boy.”** Wow! This guy thought he was so good, such a follower of God, so pious that when confronted with the things like: **“Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud,”** and **“honor your father and mother,”** he is confident enough to blurt out, “I have kept them!”

So what was his problem? If indeed, he has kept the Law of God and he has been a devout follower, obeying what God says, then why does he asks the question he does? Clearly the Jewish religion taught that if you obey the commandments of God, then you are loved by God, you have earned and deserved the gift of heaven! But this young man asks **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** Despite his piety, despite his good works and obedience, this young man knew deep down that he still had a problem. He wasn’t sure of salvation. He wasn’t sure that his good and exemplary life was good enough to get him in. In other words, this pious and religious young man still didn’t know if heaven was his home or not!

Dear people, welcome to the world of the work righteous. When you are a person who relies on what you do, how you act, what you say, and so on and so forth, the truth of the matter is that you can never, ever be sure if you have done enough. How many good works do you need for heaven? What good works do you need? Are there good works that count more, count less or don’t count at all? And can you tell me exactly what a good work is? How do you tell if what you are doing is a good work? And when it comes down to your good work score card, remember this is how you believe you are going to get to heaven, have you ever even seen it? Do you have any clue as to what is on it? In other words, if you are going to be saved by your works, if you are going to get to heaven based on your behavior and your demeanor, then how could you ever really know you have made it? Thus the question this young man asks: **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”**

This whole history is such a marvelous and revealing lesson. Our theme will be: **HOW TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE!**

The very opening words of this history are a marvel. The rich young man asks his question and in so doing he calls Jesus **“good.”** Please note the response of Jesus to this remark. Jesus says, **“Why do you call me good? No one is good—except God alone.”**

With this opening statement Jesus is already calling into question the judgment and ability of this young man to think. Why? Because only God is good, purely and truly good. Yet this young man has called Jesus “good.” He doesn’t confess that Jesus is God. He doesn’t acknowledge that Jesus is a prophet of God since already Jesus has done numerous and well known miracles! What he does though is comes to Jesus with his religious and salvation question? Why? Why not study God’s Word? Because there is no doubt that had this young man actually studied God’s Word, actually studied the prophecies of God concerning the Messiah and the salvation the Messiah would bring then his opening question would have been quite different. He would have asked: Are you the One who is to come and bring eternal life? Instead, in absolute foolishness and with deep religious ignorance this young man asks what He MUST DO!

I like how Jesus continues to work on the man’s soul. Jesus asks him about the Law and if he has kept the law. Jesus even says to him, **“You know the commandments.”** Did you note that Jesus only refers to the commandments found in the second table of the Law? These commandments are all about our neighbor and loving our neighbor as ourselves. These commandments are the easy ones to pretend to keep. After all, unless I have actually taken and killed someone, I am not guilty of murder, so we think. Yet God’s Word makes it plain that to hate your brother, to even be angry with your brother is a violation of this commandment. The same is true of all the others too. Easy to pretend to keep but when we really dig into what God’s Word says in totality on all the subjects the commandments bring up we will find we are rotten and low down sinners who do not even come close to keeping these commandments.

But our young man blurts, **“All these I have kept since I was a boy.”** He’s still not thinking. He is still not a contemplator of the truth and revelation of God. He still does not grasp the reason he has to make the sacrifices and offerings at the Temple of God on a regular basis. This young man still thinks the purpose of the commandments is to show how to earn salvation rather than to show his condemnation. Clearly this young man is way off the mark!

That’s when Jesus puts the hammer down. Jesus says, **“One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”** You say you are religious? You say you are someone who keeps the commands of God? Well how about that first commandment? How about making sure that God is number one in everything? How about showing that God is the most important to you by going out, selling your possessions, giving to the poor and then following Jesus!

Jesus told him he lacked one thing. That thing was true faith and trust in God. That thing was the lack of absolute trust in what God had decreed in His Law and in what God had revealed in his promises of the Savior. You lack putting God first and Jesus drives home the point by challenging the very wealth that God had blessed the young man with.

By the way, if Jesus were to say to you, “Go, sell everything, give the money to the poor and in this way you will have treasure in heaven,” would you do it? How about if Jesus said, “Go, sell those uniforms, bats, balls, gloves and anything else related and follow me? Or how about, Go, sell those guns, hunting outfits, bows, duck calls, and all related material and now devote as much time to me? Need one more? Go, sell your boat, your cabin, and all things related to your second home, give the money to the church and now spend your time with me? I could probably do this all day, but I think that you have the picture. What would you do if Jesus had spoken to you?

Just so we are clear, I believe you can have all of those things and still be a true and wonderful believer in the Lord. Just don’t make those things more important, more necessary than Jesus. Don’t make anything bigger than Jesus and the wonderful gift of faith Jesus sent his Spirit to give us.

Now here is where people get into trouble. They hear how the young man walked away sad because he had great wealth. He walked away from Jesus, let that sink in! Our text says, **“Jesus loved him.” T**hen Jesus turns to the disciples and says, **“How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”** Now, what Jesus says here is true. Those with wealth have a tendency to focus on the wealth, to consider the wealth the end all and be all of their life. When we make our life about our material goods, or we focus on our comfort and personal happiness it is so easy to lose the wonder and marvel of God. We can con ourselves into thinking that we have all this stuff because God must surely love me, or the modern equivalent of that today is: “Look how God has blessed Me!” Be careful with wealth and material things.

Yet that is not the heart of the lesson! Verse 21 says, **“The disciples were amazed at his words.”** Why? Because what I just said about those with wealth was obviously the way they thought. If you have wealth and goods then surely God must love you, but if Jesus says you are not going to make it as a rich person (and that’s what He says!) then please note they are completely stumped. So Jesus continues to teach. **“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.”**

All of a sudden the lesson is that it is hard to enter the kingdom of God. Harder for the rich, but nevertheless, the lesson has been expanded. It is hard to enter the kingdom of God! And I love how Jesus calls them **“children.”** He is pointing to their lack of understanding. They were children in the sense that they could not grasp that what this rich young man lacked is the problem with lots of people. It may even have been true of the disciples right at this moment. I have no doubt that the word **“children”** here is a mild redress of Jesus for their lack of understanding.

The disciples get it! You see they say, **“Who then can be saved?”** If the blessed of God aren’t getting in, who is going to make it? Now, grasp that this would be the typical viewpoint of the work righteous. Surely, the pious, religious man is going to be wealthy because of how God would love and want to bless him? With that idea crushed the disciples are then brought to the right question: **“Who then can be saved?”**

The answer: **“With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”**

There it is, the wonderful heart of this lesson. If your desire is to be saved, to enter into the kingdom of God and have the promises of eternal life and salvation then stop looking to yourself or to your works or to anything that points to and emphasizes you as the reason for being saved. Because it is, as Jesus makes clear here: *“Impossible for man to save himself!”*

If you think going to church or reading your Bible or living piously or …. Well, we know this list can be pretty long, don’t we. If you think that you are the one who makes the difference between you going to heaven or you going to hell, then you have the same problem that the rich young man and the disciples had. You think it is about you, rather than about Jesus.

God makes salvation possible because God promised, sent and fulfilled in Jesus the requirement of redemption. And just so you know, the requirement for entering eternal salvation is total perfection, pure and holy in everything. Not close, not almost, but pure and holy just as God the Father is pure, holy and perfect in everything.

So God sent His Son Jesus to do it for us. Jesus was pure and holy. Jesus kept the Law, all the Law in every way. He then went to the cross to suffer the totality of eternal damnation for every single soul that has ever lived. To make sure we grasped the awesome gift of Jesus, God set the resurrection as the stamp of his approval. Because Jesus lives, we are forgiven. Because Jesus lives, we are counted before God as holy and perfect, pure and clean in all things to the glory of God’s name. Yes, in Jesus and only in Jesus we are given the gift of eternal life with God in heaven.

But please, there needs to be faith. Faith is a gift of God given as the Son and Father send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit we are told works through the Gospel in Word and sacrament. The Holy Spirit gives the gift of faith and then as we keep the gospel in Word and sacrament before us, the Holy Spirit continues to keep us, strengthen us and reassure us of our status as God’s children and heirs of eternal life. Please make no mistake! The Holy Spirit guides you to Jesus! To think of, marvel in, worship, praise and honor Jesus. The Holy Spirit does not come so you can obey Jesus, live the pious life and then earn your salvation…same problem as the young man…He comes to direct you to Jesus and what Jesus has done for you. Because it is impossible for man to earn salvation but with God it is possible to be saved because of what Jesus has done and accomplished!

So in Jesus you can be sure. In Jesus you can know forgiveness. In Jesus you will not walk away sad, but rather you will see the love of Jesus and stay and make sure you know the right answer. God will and has given the gift of salvation. It is what Jesus is about. Amen.