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Mark 10:17-28: *The Way of Discipleship: the Impossible*

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Good morning.

We're continuing our walk through the middle of Mark's Gospel...

Focusing on Jesus teaching his disciples.

We're in the season of Lent (week 4)...

Making preparations for Holy Week...

Where we follow our Lord to the Good Friday cross...

And then join him in his Easter Day resurrection.

This morning we're picking up in Mark 10, looking at verses 17-28.

I invite you to turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of Mark

Page 1570 if you're following along in your pew Bible...

Or you can follow along with the words on the screen.

Here now God's Word from the Book of Mark.

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: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall 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 someone who is rich 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.”

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

I have a poem I’d like you to hear.

It’s called “It Couldn’t Be Done” by Edgar Guest:

Somebody said that it couldn’t be done
 But he with a chuckle replied
 That “maybe it couldn’t,” but he would be one
 Who wouldn’t say so till he’d tried.
 So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin
 On his face. If he worried he hid it.
 He started to sing as he tackled the thing
 That couldn’t be done, and he did it!

Somebody scoffed: “Oh, you’ll never do that;
 At least no one ever has done it;”
 But he took off his coat and he took off his hat
 And the first thing we knew he’d begun it.
 With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,
 Without any doubting or quiddit,
 He started to sing as he tackled the thing
 That couldn’t be done, and he did it.

There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,
 There are thousands to prophesy failure,
 There are thousands to point out to you one by one,
 The dangers that wait to assail you.
 But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,
 Just take off your coat and go to it;
 Just start in to sing as you tackle the thing
 That “cannot be done,” and you’ll do it.

This is the way of the Western world.

When someone says, “That’s impossible!”...

It only serves as motivation.

For many of us in our can-do society, all “impossible” means is “not yet.”

This morning we're looking at impossible.

The disciples ask Jesus, "Who can be saved?"

And Jesus answers, "With people it is impossible..." (10:26)

But that's jumping a little ahead of ourselves.

Let's look at what's going on in this story.

It starts with an interaction between Jesus and this unidentified man.

Jesus is starting out on his way when the man runs up to him and asks a question.

This man is not trying to trick Jesus with his question...

And he's not trying to show off any moral superiority.

You can almost hear the sincerity and the desire in this man's voice as he kneels before Jesus:

"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

And it turns out that the guy is an ideal candidate from the perspective of the disciples...

He's an ideal candidate for eternal life.

First, we know that he follows the law of God.

Jesus tells him, "You know the commandments."

And he names the ones that have to do with our relationship to those around us:

"Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not commit adultery...etc."

"All of these I've kept since I was a boy" the man says.

This man is sincere.

He has a clear conscience before God and now Jesus.

According to the written law, his behavior is clean.

And Jesus doesn't blast him after the man says this...

He doesn't call him a hypocrite and instruct him on the deeper meaning of the commandments.

Jesus recognizes his sincerity.

So first we know this man is a devout Jew...a follower of God's commands.

We also know that he's wealthy.

In verse 22 we read that he has many possessions.

During this time, wealth was a sign or a mark of God's blessing.

If you had an abundance of land, children, or animals you were thought to be favored by God.

(That's not too different from how we view things today.)

So if anyone's inheriting eternal life, it's this guy...

Keeper of the law and wealthy; blessed by God.

But Jesus, being who he is, digs a little deeper.

"You're still missing one thing..."

"I want you to go and sell everything you have, give it to the poor and come, follow me."

The guy's head drops...

His face becomes long and sad...

A gray cloud settles over him...

And he turns away grieving because he owns a lot.

He is attached to his wealth...

He has a tight fist around his possessions.

"How hard it is for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God."

The disciples are right there, seeing this and hearing it...

Probably standing there with their mouths wide open in disbelief...

Amazed at what Jesus is saying.

"If this guy, an ideal candidate for the kingdom of God, can't make it, then who can?"

"For people, this is impossible."

There's an ancient parable out there about how to catch a monkey.

A coconut would be hollowed out...

Inside would be food appealing to the monkey...

Rice or bananas...

A hole would be cut into the coconut just big enough for the monkey's open hand to fit through.

Sensing the food inside the coconut, the monkey would slip his relaxed hand into the hole...

It would grasp on to the sweet food...

And try to pull its hand out.

But the hole wasn't big enough for the closed fist.

Unwilling to drop the food, the monkey was caught with the string attached to the end of the coconut.

It is impossible for the monkey to get his closed hand out...

And for us the connection is simple:

"How hard it is for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

We are like the monkey...

We've been attracted to the sweet things of life...

We've done what is needed to be done to grab onto them...

And we've got a tight fist around it now.

"Mine," we say like a little child.

"Nobody is taking this away from me."

When we attempt to enter the kingdom of heaven, we can't get in.

When we reach for the inheritance of eternal life, we're stuck.

It's impossible.

We're stuck holding onto our wealth and possessions.

(I almost titled this sermon: "You Cannot get into to Heaven with a Coconut on Your Hand")

But let's ask ourselves, "Why is it impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God?"

Is it because God doesn't like money?

Is it because God doesn't like people with money?

No, it's because of how easily wealth and possessions become a substitute for God.

We know that there's something wrong in us...

We know that there's something wrong in this world...

We're surrounded by brokenness...

And our lives our filled by it.

We get into a fight with a friend, parent, or spouse...

We admit our mistake and we say, “I’ll do better next time.”

Or one of our sins gets exposed and we say “I won’t do that again.”

But what happens?

We do it any way.

We get mad and yell and cut up our loved ones with hurtful words.

Or we give into the sin yet again.

“All spheres of life—

Family and friendship,

Work and worship,

School and province,

Play and art—

All of it bears the wounds of our rebellion.” (*Cont. Testimony 16*)

Sensing this brokenness...

Sensing that something is missing...

Sensing that we’re disconnected from God...

The source of our life...

We try to remedy the problem on our own.

We try to make ourselves feel better.

We try to fabricate that missing connection.

And we usually turn to our possessions to do it.

Our possessions or our wealth make us feel better.

They fill the hole inside of us left by our sin...

They become a security blanket for us in a world of brokenness.

We may not recognize it...

But we’ve bought into the mentality of our culture around us:

This culture that says, “Nothing is impossible.”

“But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,
Just take off your coat and go to it;
Just start in to sing as you tackle the thing

That “cannot be done,” and you’ll do it.”

Jesus says, “For people, it is impossible to be saved.”

And we say, “Nothing is impossible...I’m going to try.”

I don’t think we’re consciously saying this...

But our actions, attitudes and behaviors are screaming this about us.

We keep trying to fill the hole left by our being disconnected from God...

We hold on so tightly to the things of this world...

That we fail to recognize our own need.

Our possessions and our “things” shield us from feeling the deepest hurt of being disconnected from God...

They shield us from feeling the hurt of being disconnected from one another.

We hold on tightly...

And we keep trying and trying, convinced that these things will get us through.

“For us, it is impossible.”

“No one is good.”

No one is able to enter the kingdom of God with a coconut on their hand.

“With people, it is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

In Christ, God will do the impossible.

There’s a familiar phrase that shows up in these middle chapters of Mark’s Gospel:

“On the way.”

We see it in the opening verse of our passage:

“As Jesus started on his way...”

It’s easy to read past this...

But Mark is using this phrase to keep our focus on the big picture.

From the very beginning of Mark’s story, Jesus is on the way.

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare *the way* for the Lord!”

Jesus is not wandering aimlessly through Mark’s Gospel...

Just teaching us how to be disciples...

And doing some cool healings and miracles along the way.

His path is always direct.

Jesus is walking to the cross.

These are his footsteps along with ours going to the cross.

The road he's on will lead to his death.

He is on the way...

And he's going there for his people.

So when Jesus asks this man to lay down his possessions...

To open his hand and release that deep attachment...

To let go of that strong grasp...

Jesus does so taking no less of a demand upon himself.

Jesus asks this man to give up his wealth...

Knowing that he will soon give up his own life.

Jesus will soon be nailed to a cross for the sins of this man...

For the sins of his disciples...

And for the sins of all his people.

God will do the impossible through Christ...

Bringing a broken people back into relationship with their creator...

Bringing a broken people into his kingdom...

...and welcoming them into eternal life with him.

Brothers and Sisters, God has done the impossible through Christ.

We've said that the world is broken...

We experience the consequences of living in a fallen world everyday...

And we try, on our own, to remedy the situation...

And we continually experience how impossible this is...

How futile it is to use the "things" around us as a comfort and shield.

But only God is able to do the impossible...

Only God is able to make things right between us and him...

We believe that we have no access to God...

We are not welcome into his Kingdom...

Except through our one mediator, Jesus Christ. (Belgic Confession, Art 26.)

God the Son was made human...

Uniting both divine and human natures...

And he gave up his life on the cross...

So that we might have access to our loving God...

Eternal life is being reconciled to our God...

Having a restored relationship to him.

And this Jesus, we don't have to be terrified when we come to him.

He doesn't yell...he won't shame.

Remember he looks at the man—

The man desiring eternal life;

Who said he's followed the commandments.

Jesus looks at him and it says, "He loved him."

Jesus saw the man, and knows what he's trying to do...

Jesus knows that the man is trying to do the impossible.

And Jesus looks at us in the same way.

He knows we're trying to do the impossible...

Trying to fix our brokenness by surrounding ourselves with things...

Holding on tightly to that which we think will heal us.

Jesus looks at us, and he loves us.

"There is no one in heaven or on earth who loves us more than Jesus Christ" (BC, Art. 26)

And he offers us an invitation...

"Lay it all down."

"Release your grip."

"Surrender, and follow me."

As disciples walking the road to Good Friday and Easter we're following where Jesus walked.

And we know that we can lay it down...

Because he loves us...

Because he's already purchased everything that we need.

He's already made us right with God and restored us to life.

To God be the glory, now and forever.

Amen.