**Mark 10:23-31 October 17, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson the continuation of Mark chapter 10 here re-reading these words. “And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, ‘Children, how difficult 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 person to enter the kingdom of God.’ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, ‘Then who can be saved?’ This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As you heard last week, there isn’t a happy ending. The next part of this particular section doesn’t continue with the rich young man getting a few hundred yards away and realizing his mistake and running back and they all lived happily ever after. No, that scene isn’t what we find this week, instead we find a group of people who were at first amazed and than greatly astonished. They were amazed and astonished because suddenly everything they thought about how salvation worked was turned upside down. Everything they thought about how God worked and showed favor and approval of his people was completely changed. Their astonishment came from an assumption based upon wealth and power in this world that it is linked to God’s happiness with the individual. And if there was one group that would make it into the kingdom of God, it would be the ones that God has showered with his love, the ones that God has shown favor to in this world, it would have to be the wealthy. The poor, the destitute, those born with disabilities or into families of dysfunction, those who were born outside of God’s holy people the Jews and who were Gentiles or who were married to Gentiles or who had less than honorable professions, they were the ones who would have to suffer and scratch and claw and fight, and make their way up from the very bottom to get into God’s kingdom. That was the way they thought. That was how it worked. But Jesus changes it completely. The rich and wealthy were the ones who had the greatest difficulty and so they are left simply asking, “Then who can be saved?” If they can’t do it, who can? And the answer is, no one.

You learn a lot of things about yourself out on a football field. I was a freshmen in high school and we were going through 2 a day practices in the heat of August. It was grueling. I was tired and worn down. I had never played football before but I was the 3rd son of the Sherry family and my brothers had both played for Valley Lutheran High School in Saginaw, and so I played too. My oldest brother Drew was a lineman, one of the very best, strong, smart, and crafty. My middle brother Dan was quick, agile, determined. He played running back and could fly with the ball, I got to see him in those first years when I got to high school because he was a junior when I was a freshmen. I remember the final practice of two a days in August my freshmen year because we were running sprints and we were all run ragged, tired, breathing hard, some guys had been throwing up, it was hot, it was the last thing we were doing, and I wasn’t able to do much at all. I had adopted a strategy of staying in the middle of the pack, just make sure I wasn’t one of the last ones making it up and down the field. The JV and the Varsity were both running at the end and I remember the head coach of the varsity team say that if anyone could beat him, then we would be done and we could call it a day. I knew there was no way I could do it, I was just a lowly freshmen, and the majority of us on the JV team were always lagging behind the varsity players. But I remember as we ran that time I saw my brother Dan sprinting out ahead of everyone, neck and neck with the head coach. We all ran and watched as Dan was gonna do it, he was gonna save us from more torture on that hot summer day. As they touched the line and turned around and ran back Dan was running as hard as he could, but the coach beat him, not by a lot, but he still won. And it was so defeating as I trotted back to the line with everyone else, breathing hard. I thought in my mind, “if Dan couldn’t do it, who could?” And no one did. We ran and ran and ran…

It’s that feeling that I described that I want for you to get into your minds because that’s how the disciples felt in this moment hearing about the wealthy and salvation. They were amazed and then Mark writes they were exceedingly astonished. Their whole world had been turned upside down. If the rich couldn’t be saved, then who could? And the first thing Jesus says is “With man it is impossible.” If wealth cannot save, then what good is it? If wealth isn’t an indication of God’s love than what is it an indication of? In our world today we see wealth as a blessed inheritance, or as the fruits of labor, or as the result of good luck and happenstance in the lives of someone who has it. But our Old Testament lesson paints a different picture. Wealth isn’t seen as a great blessing, as the disciples seem to believe in our Gospel lesson, instead wealth is seen as a curse. “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes. Sweet is the sleep of the laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.” A lack of satisfaction, a vain chasing after something that doesn’t last, an increase in those who seek to take and consume what you have and a restlessness that comes with wealth that takes away the rest that comes from a sense of accomplishment and contentment with what you have even if it’s less than others. That’s what we find written here by Solomon who had more wealth than we can even imagine. But that’s not how our world works. We see the wealthy and envy them, we covet what they have, they can do anything, they can fly up into space, they can afford mansions and fancy cars and can get anything they possible want all the time, how could they not be happy? How could anything be impossible for them?

But their wealth is a curse in that it distracts from the Lord. Their wealth is a curse in it becomes the idol it was for the rich young man and they are linked to it in such a way that it drowns them into the abyss, like a man with his pockets filled with gold and jewels who is on a sinking ship. What do we find amongst the wealthy and powerful? Happiness? We hear stories and read autobiographies of depression and sadness, even the most joyful and funny comedians who entertain others and use their unbelievable talents fall into a despair they never can climb out of. Wealth isn’t the answer to life’s problems, if anything it makes them worse. It’s an exchange of one set of problems for another. A life lived for the world around you is like trying to save an impossibly damaged sinking ship. There is no salvation found in the vessel you are on. It is impossible. You can take any champion of this world and put them on a pedestal, from celebrities, politicians, personal family heroes, to popes, athletes, rich and powerful people who give to charity and do amazing things for the betterment of our world, and believe they can do it! They can accomplish it, maybe not me, but they can. And then that sinking feeling, when the truth of God’s Word stares us in the face. If they can’t do it….who can?

Jesus can, and did. “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” The race was lost that day, but the practice did end. The ship may be sinking, but there is a better one, that you are carried onto and where you will be saved. God shows his love for us by sending His Son to take our place and to accomplish what we can’t. The answer is not found in yourself, the answer is found in Christ. Lean not on your own understanding, your own power, your own money, your own anything, lean only on Christ and rely upon him. He receives you, looks on you in love, and does what you can’t. He is perfect. He is holy. He is your substitute in terms of the punishment you deserve. He is your Savior in the work he does to save you from the waters that are dragging you down to death. He does it all for you. He gives it all to you. You can’t do it, but there is someone who can and you know His name and you see His Work not only in the Scriptures but in your life, in the moments that you were shown grace and mercy and a love that doesn’t make sense. He does the impossible for you.

And he makes you rich. Not in a worldly sense of riches in terms of checking your bank account and this church has deposited money into your account, but he makes you rich in exactly what Jesus talks about at the end of our Gospel lesson this morning. “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions and in the age to come eternal life.” You are wealthy, perhaps not in the eyes of the world or what they measure wealth with, but that’s a blessing in itself, for wealth can be a curse and a poison to your soul. You are wealthy in those who are around you, you are part of a family of faith that reaches farther than this building, farther than this county, farther than this state or even this country or even this world. You have the support of the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. You are surrounded by brothers and sisters in Christ who are not related to you and yet you are wealthy with their love and support. You receive the blessing of others and you are called to be the blessing to others. And to want to be with people in their brokenness, and their despair, and their troubles, if they are wealthy, or poor. If they are part of this church or not. Because the work of salvation was accomplished for you and them and God has put you in their life to tell them the truth as Jesus did for the rich young man.

But even in those seemingly impossible moments, remember it is God who works through you. It is Christ who saved you and did the impossible in your place, and it is the Spirit who will speak through you the truth of God’s Word and give you the words to say. Sometimes it’s specific, it’s profound, it’s a bible verse or a verse of a hymn that you didn’t even realize you remembered. Sometimes it’s clunky, it’s awkward, it’s informal, it’s something as simple as just inviting someone to come over and talk about anything. God uses you to do the impossible because through Jesus Christ the impossible was done on your behalf. Praise God, be amazed and astonished by his love and see His work in your life and how he takes the impossible for you and answer the question of who? By being Your Savior.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.