

Twenty First Sunday After Pentecost October 13 2024

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15; Hebrews 4:12-16; Mark 10:17-31

“Seek the Lord and live” exhorts Amos. A promise that in pursuing God we will find life that truly is life, not this facsimile we create on our own. This is Gospel, good news, a promise filled with hope for those who are perishing.

Then we have Hebrews, “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.” Is this good news? That the Word of God- which is Jesus certainly-but it is also the living and active Word that comes to us when we read scripture, when we hear it proclaimed. That this Word is one that will cut right through our BS. Those lies we tell others and ourselves about us. For there is nothing we can hide from the one to whom we will render an account.

So, which is it? Is God the one in whom we find life, comfort, safety? Or is God the one whose very Word will cut right through us and lay us bare before ourselves and God. God who is the one to whom we will render an account. As a good Christian who happens to be Lutheran, I would answer... both. Now, that can be a cop out, but I truly believe that to be faithful in following Jesus we need both.

Our Gospel text shows why. “What must I do to inherit eternal life.” This from the man who has run up and fallen on his knees before Jesus. Jesus responds

with an almost expected question about some of the key commandments, have you kept those? With confidence, the man says he has... since his youth.

Jesus, perhaps not hearing what he expected, looks at the man. Not with a casual glance, but a more deliberate, intense look. One that peers into his heart. And our text says, Jesus loves him. The only time in the Gospel of Mark that we hear something like that. Then Jesus tells him, you are running behind in only one thing. Sell all that you own, give the money to the poor, (your storehouse of treasure is in heaven!) then come follow me! The same invitation he gave to the other disciples.

The man's face falls, and he goes away from Jesus, this man who had so recently come running up to Jesus, seeking God and life- now turns away from him and leaves, grieving, cut to the marrow of his bones, because he has many possessions and apparently just can't do without them.

Go, sell all that you own, give the money to the poor, and come, follow me.

Words that cut to the bone? As one commentator says, there are a number of ways we try to manage this text. To let ourselves off the hook. Kind of like we talked about last week. One is, that this is a particular command to a particular person and does not apply to us. Or that it only applies to the rich and we can all think of someone richer than we are. Or that it applies to everyone, but Jesus lets us off the hook (this is only possible with God). Or (my personal favorite) that this is not demanding that we sell everything but is about how attached we are to what we have as opposed to our commitment to God.

But what if Jesus meant what he said? What if he literally wants us to sell what we own and give the money to the poor and then follow him? What if this is what it means to seek God and live?

What is your first reaction to that? Gut level? I don't know about you, but it makes me squirm. Well, that's not practical! How will I live! I have a family to care for! We can marshal our responses quickly.

Where do these responses come from? Ultimately, I think they come from fear. Fear that there will not be enough. Fear that others won't do the same and we will alone be destitute. Fear we will be left behind. Fear of losing the comforts, the "necessities" we do have. To some extent, that fear is present whether we have many possessions or few.

But don't we pray each week, "Give us this day our daily bread"? Martin Luther in his Small Catechism reminds us that our daily bread is everything we need to live, "food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, money, relationships." And that all this is provided by God. Doesn't Jesus remind us in Matthew to not worry about what we will eat or drink because if God clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the birds of the air how much more will he clothe and feed us? Why then should we fear that we will lack? But we do, don't we. And maybe part of that fear comes from our own understanding that there are people out there who are destitute, who do not have the basics of life. At least part of that reason may be that we have not sold all that we own and given the money to the poor. And that is an individual and collective conviction.

The US has \$139.4 trillion in wealth. Evenly divided among the roughly 333.3 million people, that would be about \$418,241 each. Is that enough daily bread?

In terms of income, if you as an individual earn the average (2022) in the US of \$37,585 then you earn more than 96.5% of the rest of the globe. Which means that globally, we all are rich.

“Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

The text from Hebrews is apt today because I don't know about you but when I confront the possibility that Jesus meant it and my own fear rises up, my lack of trust that God will provide. That when I follow the rabbit hole of thought and see the outcome of that fear being a cause for others to be in want, that word cuts into me and I feel like I am laid bare not just to God but to myself. See that I am something less than I want to be or see myself as.

What then are we to do? Or, as the disciples put it, who then can be saved? Do we give in to despair or just give up?

And we come back to the beginning of the text. The young man asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. The reality is - nothing. Inheritance is given to those who are the children of the one who dies. It is not earned, but it is a gift to the one who is part of the family.

Did you hear what Jesus called the disciples? Children! They, we! are already inheritors of life age long. Life that truly is life. That part is easy because we don't do anything. That part comes in the claim God has on us in baptism. Child, you are mine and will inherit the benefits of my household. Remember, Jesus loves the man before anything else. The love of Christ is not because we follow. It is because of who Jesus is. He looks on us and loves us.

This is where the last part of Hebrews comes into focus. That in Jesus we have one who understands. Who knows firsthand our weakness. And who loves us anyway. So, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Because the reign of God is so radically different from the reign of the world. The reign of God is a place not only where we share our abundant resources from God so that everyone has enough, it is also a place where everyone is neighbor, there are no strangers, we love everyone without exception; friends/enemies, those who think like me and those who don't. The reign of God is a place where all are cared for; with food, shelter, drink, medicine. Where no one is poor because we all share with one another until all have enough.

Trying to do this on our own is a difficult if not impossible task. Because we are afraid. Because we don't trust. And even as the Word cuts through our BS and our fear, we boldly approach Jesus and cry out with the Father of the epileptic boy, "I believe...help my unbelief." And through his mercy and grace, we try, in some small, imperfect way to live out this calling to follow. To get a glimpse of the reign of God not for what it gets us but because of who we are, inheritors of the Kingdom.

And we see those glimpses of the reign of God, don't we. When a farmer is sick or dies and the family wonders how they will get the crops in, and the neighbors show up...leaving their own fields standing...to bring in the harvest.

We see it in our own lives when we take what feels like a risk and are generous, when we might be inclined to keep it close, and find that there is still enough, more than enough! left to live on. When we risk something for others, and we get what we need just when we need it. God does provide

our daily bread. Often, through others. God provides daily bread for others, often through us.

This is the storehouse promised to us. This inheritance that we all receive, now! In this age! For we have a fine home in this place. And if any of us were homeless, we would have a home anywhere among us, wouldn't we? Food, how many people find when there is a new baby and time is short, that they don't have to worry about meals for a while as people bring them over. Or when someone is sick or recovering from surgery? Look around you. We have all these siblings in Christ! Hundreds in this community alone! This is the Reign of God, right here and right now. This is the promise, that with God, with each other, all things are possible.

What if Jesus, meant it all? That he looks at us and loves us, enough to die a horrible death on a cross so that we might live. That we are inheritors of eternal life through him. That we should sell what we own, give the money to the poor and follow him! That the work to enter the kingdom is hard and that we have already inherited that kingdom, seen glimpses of it in the world. What if all of that is true? Where does it leave us?

Right here. On a cool Sunday morning, surrounded by our inheritance, siblings, parents, in a beautiful house, thinking uncomfortably about our own wealth, about the poor, ready to receive the meal our Lord provides for all people. His own Body and Blood, visible sign of his love for us. Now.

It leaves us... pondering, what does this text call us to? In this time leading up to approving church budgets, of a season to give thanks for the bounty we have, the gift of Jesus we have been given. Knowing the impossibility of that call, knowing that with God all things are possible, knowing Jesus loves us with a love of infinite mercy and compassion. It leaves us praying together, we believe! Help our unbelief.