
**Sermon – 20th Sunday after Pentecost
Mark 10:17-22**

October 14, 2018

“So A Man Walks up to Jesus and Says...”

English author C.S. Lewis wrote a series of children’s books entitled “The Chronicles of Narnia.” In the second book of the series – “The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe” there’s a conversation between a young girl named Lucy and her hosts in the land of Narnia – Mr. and Mrs. Beaver. The Beavers have heard that Aslan the Lion has returned to Narnia – they hope for a vanquishing of the White Queen and an end to her frozen spell on the land.

But Lucy and her brothers are visitors to Narnia and have never heard of this “Aslan,” so they ask about him. “Aslan...why he’s the King, he’s the Lord of the whole wood...he’s in Narnia this very moment, and he’ll settle the White Queen all right.” Mr. Beaver then quotes a poem about Aslan – “wrong will be right when Aslan comes in sight. At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more.” Lucy, still quite uncertain, is told she’ll understand all this when she meets him. “Is he a man” she asks? “A man, Aslan? Certainly not – I tell you he is King and Son of the Great Emperor beyond the sea. He is the Lion, the great Lion.” “Oh...a lion then...but is he safe”, Lucy wonders. “Safe, said Mr. Beaver...course he isn’t safe. But he is good.”

Narnia is a tale of a God who is fierce, but good. Put it another way - a Lord whose law is immutable, but whose love is immeasurable. A man, we’re only told eventually he’s a man of some wealth, comes to Jesus in our story from Mark, and asks him how he can gain eternal life. It’s a good question, a very good Jewish question in fact, asked by Jews all the time of their teachers. Jesus gives a very good Jewish teacher answer – keep the commandments, in them is life – God’s word was often called “the bread of life” in fact.

But the young man is persistent, how could he know for sure, and make this question of eternal life as sure and secure as say...his lot in life? He was a man who knew how to get, and hold the things he wanted, but this gift of eternal life, he’d not figured out how to acquire on his own. He must have liked Jesus’ answer, because he gave an eager reply – ‘all this I’ve done from my youth’. What else must I do? It was at this precise moment, that this man discovered Jesus was not just a man – and more than a good teacher – he was somewhat of a Lion.

In the gospel of Mark folks are quite perplexed about Jesus. He is misunderstood frequently –shivering disciples in a sinking boat wonder “who is this, that even the wind and the waves obey him.” Teachers of the law who hear him speak grace to a lame man grumble; “why does this man talk like that – who can forgive sins but God alone?” Now comes a man with impeccable religious credentials – no sins to forgive evidently - at least according to the law – who discovers that Jesus is no ordinary teacher of the law but the Son of the lawgiver – and the lawgiver can quite easily ratchet up the requirements of the law.

Jesus is not safe – at least if your idea of a pleasant afternoon is polishing your own credentials for salvation. No, the Christian life is one of total commitment not targeted activities. But Jesus is good. He knew perfectly well what string to pluck with this man – possessions, which are both things attained and

therefore a matter of personal pride, and things enjoyed, and therefore objects of personal devotion upon which we personally depend.

No, Jesus is not safe – but he is good. Our Lord knew what this man’s particular weakness was in life – yet Mark is clear, Jesus still loved him. Yes, this is a story about wealth and possessions – one that illustrates how prone we are to give possessions high place in our lives. But Jesus could have just as well encountered the High Priest of the Temple and told him – keeper of the commandments he undoubtedly was, that eternal life would only require of him resignation of his post – one he may have worked and yearned for since he was a youth. Or Jesus could have encountered a Roman official and told him eternal life was his if only he’d give up the privileges of his Roman citizenship.

So what about you – what might Jesus say to you? You respect your parents, live honest, life honoring lives and keep your tongue about your neighbors. Ok, but what about the upcoming election – are you ready to vote blue instead of red this year? Of that Sabbath day command are you ready to change jobs or tell your coach Sunday tournaments are no longer possible? Would your face fall upon learning that was “the one thing you lack?” Preachers are not immune to this by the way – we preach justification by grace but a lot of us live justification by ordination!

The takeaway from this story is this - keep all the commands the Commander simply adds another - if salvation by our own works was his plan that is. But that’s not his plan. Mark says that Jesus “had started on his way” when this man came up to him. Mark of course means “on the way to Jerusalem” and a cross. The interruption by this man is but one illustration of how personal virtue, or for that matter most anything we’d call personal “gets in the way” of the one thing God does ask of us - personal trust in the forgiving love of his Son Jesus.

Of course why anyone would let something temporary get in the way of gaining something lasting is a question all must answer – everyday. The man in this story got up and went away – but his salvation, Jesus, continued on his way. This is a story about a man who concluded his possessions were too high a price to pay to love Jesus, and a man named Jesus who didn’t consider his life too high a price for anyone, including you. This we know...and it’s no mere children’s rhyme - wrong is made right when a cross comes in sight. Because of Jesus, you lack nothing. AMEN