



Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

SERMON – 20TH PENTECOST

MARK 10:17-22

OCTOBER 10, 2021

“GOOD CONGREGATION...WHAT MUST WE DO?”

On the church year calendar this is the 20th Sunday after Pentecost – except that it has also been dubbed “*Pastor Appreciation Sunday*.” I doubt the church fathers, much less our Good Lord, anticipated such a spectacle – lest we forget Jesus strongly hinted those who succeeded him would not exactly be appreciated for their efforts. But by your kindness, this day has been placed on Calvary Lutheran’s calendar and for it I thank you.

This of course begs the question – should pastors now come together and designate a “*congregation appreciation Sunday*” say, for example, the Sabbath before we pencil in for ourselves and our families a week at the lake! I thank you for the kind words expressed to me in the form of cards and the treats for today’s coffee hour procured with my palate in mind! I shall indulge with much appreciation.

I do appreciate greatly the call to preach and teach and administer the sacraments among you. Pastors should discharge such with reverence to the Lord for these His gifts to the church as well as for calling into existence by the Holy Spirit the office of ministry and congregations in which that gospel and those sacraments are longed for.

That gospel for today is considered one of our Lord’s “hard sayings” – a discipleship not easily accepted or adhered to. You might say our Lord’s gospel for today is impossible to adhere to – so stringent the requirements for being a follower of Christ. Yet I found it a rather serendipitous choice of texts for what as I said is “*our occasion*” today – appreciation – whether of pastor by congregation or congregation by pastor. How often I have longed to be called a “good teacher” and how appreciative I am when you tell me I may be one.

How wonderful, I’ve thought to myself, would be the experience of having a congregant come to me and say “*pastor...what must I do.*” How delicious the opportunity to pull out a handy, dandy “time and talent sheet” and go down the list with them on the spot! I can envision some long time members checking off a dozen boxes or so representing things you are or have been involved in only to give me the opportunity to say, for example...*ah, one thing you lack...I see you’ve never served on the stewardship committee. And what luck – our giving campaign is just weeks away!* (This lesson is after all about wealth. Imagine a campaign logo such as...“*Jesus says sell it all and give it to us!*”)

But is that the gospel in today’s gospel...Our Lord saying, “one thing you lack?” Faith calls for obedience, and obedience sacrifice. Our giving should at least inconvenience us. Yes, wealth is in view in this lesson – but recall the litany of things that have been in view in Mark 9 and 10 alone...to those whom Jesus discovered arguing amongst themselves who was the greatest, he might have said “*one thing you lack...humility and a servant spirit.*”

To those who were envious of what others were doing in Jesus' name he could have said *"one thing you lack...a sober recognition of just whose church this is and whose name matters."* To those whose actions might lead others into sin, he might have said *"one thing you lack...love of that person as yourself and recognition of the name you may be tarnishing by your public conduct."* Jesus could have said all these things...and he might have. We know what he said to a man who had been able to acquire much in his life and now turned his attention, admirably I might add, to the one thing he thought he lacked – assurance of eternal life.

Jesus was this man's opportunity to add that to his possessions. What he lacked was understanding of how Jesus would do that. As with any thing we'd call "our possessions" – material or otherwise, the question is not whether we own and control it but if it owns and controls us. This young man desires a good thing – Jesus knows that, why else would Mark tell us that Jesus looked at the man *"and loved him."* Whatever else we may make of him – he longed for what a person should long for. "What must I do to inherit eternal life" was his question. He wasn't trying to buy anything – he wanted to know how to live such that he would receive it, however.

And that is not all far from the mark of what the Christian faith teaches – what Christ himself teaches. We hear the call to discipleship all the time from our Lord, and that discipleship has a cruciform shape to it – faith active in sacrificial love. It's hard to hang on to things when your life as it were hangs on a cross. Every one of us ought to ask, *"what is the worst thing that could happen if we did take Jesus words seriously, and relinquished "that one more thing."* Our lesson tells us that upon hearing what his "one more thing" was the man went away sad. And what about you, if Jesus were to put his finger on your "one thing."

Rather than go away sad, countenance fixed on what you lack, perk up and run with abandon to those words that are the true gospel in this gospel – that before Jesus asks, he assures us of his love. What he asks of you is to follow him to his cross, to believe that is the only thing needful, there you receive by faith the one thing everyone lacks - your life back because Jesus didn't love his more than yours.

That is what all of us in this room – preacher and congregation ought to appreciate today. Oh, that in our souls known all too well by our Holy God it would be only one thing we lacked, eh? Take this from the young man in our story today - pay heed to your life. Line them up with what you know God wants you to do. Do it with a humble conscience that surrenders pride and envy and covetousness – but in so doing cling to the one thing needful, Jesus, and your eternal life will take care of itself. Steward all that God has placed at your disposal in life well, in service of neighbor through trust in your Savior, and your treasure will be exactly where it needs to be – in Jesus's hands. That's a good place for it be. AMEN