

Mark 10:17-22

We need to pay close attention to the question asked of Jesus in our text...*“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”* The question portrays a complete lack of understanding on the part of the man who posed it. Any solid Lutheran Christian could tell that man where he was wrong. You could use last Sunday’s Gospel text--the verses just before our text for today: *“Whoever”* says Jesus, *“Does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”* Children inherit everything from their parents not because of what they do, but because of who they are. A servant may do all the work around a millionaire’s mansion, and still he gets no part of the inheritance. But the child who does not work, gets it all simply because he is born into the family. To inherit eternal life, as the man was asking, there was nothing he could do. You inherit eternal life from God by being born as a child into His family through Holy Baptism.

So why did Jesus point the man, not to Baptism, but to the Ten Commandments? *“You know the Commandments,”* He said, *“Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.”* If that man could not, in any way, inherit eternal life by his obedience to the Commandments, why did Jesus point him to them?

Have any of you fathers ever watched your young son struggle? Perhaps he was trying to unlock a padlock with a key. You watched him for a minute or two, trying every which way with grunts and groans to unlock it, and then you said, *“Son, you’ll never open it with that; you have the wrong key.”* Mom would have cried, *“That’s child abuse!”* but you knew he was learning a valuable lesson. Jesus did that to the man in our text. The man was bound and determined to open heaven’s door with the Ten Commandments. And Jesus was perfectly willing to play along with his futile efforts, knowing he would never open it with that key. He let the man struggle. He let him act foolishly and speak foolishly. And then Jesus said to him, *‘You have the wrong key...Come, follow Me, and you will have treasure in heaven.’*

We are so quick to help not just children, but church members, catechumens, even the pastor, that we do not allow them to struggle and wrestle with their problems. I don’t want Confirmation Class members who know the right answers. I want them to know, through persistent struggle, why all the other answers are wrong, and why Jesus is the only Truth. I want church members who come to Bible Class and wrestle with the Scriptures so that they know why, beyond any doubt, they want to remain dedicated members of the Lutheran Church. And don’t you want a pastor who struggles, even with sweat and tears, as he not only wrestles with the sermon text each week, but as he struggles with the members, with their problems, with their issues, with their sins? *“We must through much tribulation,”* the Bible says, *“enter the kingdom of heaven.”* You show me a Christian who never struggles with sin, and temptation, and other problems, and I’ll show you a hypocrite. God prunes us through our struggles. If He does not allow us to struggle, then we are not His true children. It says this in Hebrews 12.

So that man struggled. But he refused to try the other key. *“All these Commandments I have kept,”* he said to Jesus, *“From when I was young.”* He called Jesus, *“Good Teacher,”* but what was really in his heart was the thinking that he was a good student. *“I’m good enough to get into heaven, aren’t I, Jesus? This key just has to work!”* The man would not let go, could not let go, of himself, his works, his goodness, his key to what he thought was heaven’s door, but in truth it was the key to the door into hell.

Which key are you holding right now? Are you holding on to your good works like that man was? Are you thinking, hoping, God will give heaven to you because you try to be good? Are you holding on to your church membership? Are you thinking that as long as your name is on the rolls, you hold in your hand the key to heaven? Maybe you have an entire set of keys in your hand. 'I try to be good, I'm on the church rolls, and I trust in Jesus. One of these keys has to work. As long as I keep them all, I should be fine.'

But you cannot hold on to heaven if you are holding any other key in your hand. That's why Jesus told that man to sell everything. Get rid of it! Give it away! It was destroying him. That man would never follow Jesus as long as he had a key in his hand that he thought may work. Jesus is the only key. He is the only door into heaven. And no one can hold on to their wealth and Jesus at the same time. "*No one can serve two masters,*" He says. But that man loved himself too much to let go. He went away sad. He could not put Jesus over himself, over all he had, over all that was good about him, all the good he had done in his life since he was a youth.

Is that man in hell today? I don't know. But I do know that Jesus loved him. It says so. "*Looking at him, Jesus loved him.*" That man would not give everything up for Jesus, so Jesus gave everything up for him because He loved him. That man went away sad, but Jesus went the way of the cross. No sadness, only joy as He gave up everything--even His place with God--for that man, and for you. Jesus went away in chains. He went away being led by ruthless soldiers. Jesus went the way into death, even into hell to suffer for you and me, because we do not like to give up anything for Him.

No one is born holding the right key in their hand. But through your birth by Holy Baptism into God's family, Jesus places into your hand the right key. He gives Himself to you. He is not too proud to make His home with sinners. He covered Himself with your sins on the cross. God charged your wrongs to Him so that you, He forgives. It's true! You and I, who show little love for God, He forgives. It's not that we work for His mercy. It's yours by grace. He forgives you because Jesus died for you.

And if that is not reason to follow Him, nothing is. Anyone who can hear that their God has borne their sin, has suffered their punishment, has endured hell for them, and not want to follow Jesus, makes Jesus sad. But it will never prevent Him from loving you.

Let's go back to the man in our text who went away sad. What I'm going to say here is not biblical truth, but it is the opinion of a number of Bible scholars. That man who had the wrong key, who refused to give up his goodness, who refused to follow Jesus...that man was the Apostle Paul. He went away sad here, for he was a wealthy, self-righteous Pharisee. But later in life, a few years down the road, on the road to Damascus Jesus came up to him this time, and now He points him to Baptism, and He makes of him a dedicated missionary who followed Jesus half-way around the world. Why? Because "*looking at him, Jesus loved him.*"

You are here in God's House this morning, and you may have on your heart the same kind of question asked of Jesus in our text..."How am I to be saved? Do I have the right key?" Friend, be assured, Jesus is here with you now. He is here looking at you. He is here for you because He loves you. He is the Key. Throw away all other keys in your hand. Through Jesus, and through Him alone, you enter the kingdom of heaven. Amen.