



Sunday's Sermon

Pastor Chelsea Globe

Growing Together in Christ to Love and Serve All People

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

October 10, 2021

Hebrews 4:12-16

Mark 10:17-31

- Good morning! I'm Pastor Chelsea Globe, Pastor at UW Lutheran Campus Ministry
 - Any Huskies out there? Cougs?
 - Lutheran Campus Ministry has been through a tough couple of years...
 - And now that we are back on our feet, launched our fall program and have actual space and students showing up, one of the things that my Board and I are asking ourselves is:
 - How will we know when we have succeeded?
 - In this new world of ministry and COVID and being in the "none zone" and all that... What will it look like to be successful? How do we define success, as a ministry and as a program?
 - I'm sure these are questions you've asked yourself as a congregation at some point.
 - We often put a lot of work into mission statements and goals.
 - We are always trying to grow, build up our bank account, bring in more people, right?
 - Those are the typical markers we look for as "success" in a congregation.
 - Butts in seats and money in the bank!
- Our Gospel reading today is all about the same thing: What does it mean to be "successful"?
 - What are the signs of success, that we're doing a good job, as people of God and those who gather in Christ's name?
 - That's what this man who runs up to Jesus wants to know.
 - Is he doing it right?
 - Has he checked off all the boxes?
 - Is he getting faith "right"?
 - It's easy to judge him for this, but let's be honest: We all do this.
 - We like to be able to measure our success and progress.
 - Show up for church (here or online): check.
 - Tithe monthly: check.
 - Volunteer for events: check.
 - Serve on committees and council: check.
 - Pray or read the Bible or attend education time: Check check check.

- But is that what faith, what this whole religious life, is supposed to be about?
 - Not according to Jesus.
 - Yes, there are the commandments and the guidelines we find in scripture.
 - There are specific ways we worship, spiritual practices we take on, that, let's face it, sometimes do feel more like checking a box than connecting with God.
 - But all those "rules," our ways of being and the things we do are not metrics for us to judge how well we are doing "faith," what good Christians we are, or how we measure up to others.
 - The whole point of all of that, of all of this (gesture around), is opening ourselves up to change in here (heart).
 - The commandments and traditions exist because following them teaches us what it means to live a life that is shaped by God's values, God's definition of "success," not ours or society's.
 - And that's the young man's problem here.
 - It's not a problem that he's rich, though perhaps you could argue that Jesus is remarking upon the inequity of resources that exist.
 - But I don't think this is a blanket condemnation of wealth.
 - Remember, Jesus sees this man, and loves him.
 - He knows what the problem is.
 - He can see into his heart, and can see that though he follows all the "rules" and does what he should to make him a good God-fearing man, a "successful" community and synagogue member, Jesus can see that it hasn't yet gone from here (head) to here (heart).
 - The rules and practices have remained just that for this guy – ways to show how good, how successful, how holy he is.
- And what Jesus is saying here is that faith isn't about checking boxes.
 - It's not about those outward signs of being "right" or "good," of what we as a society or a church would point to as signs of success.
 - We are here because we are willing to be transformed, from the inside out.
 - We are seekers, showing up to continually conform our values, our definition of success in faith and life, to God's and to Christ's.
- It can be hard to remember that.
 - Even the disciples hadn't quite gotten it yet and were shocked by Jesus' words!
 - We all get distracted by those other, more impressive outward metrics and signs of success.
 - We want our churches to be beautiful, our member list to be long, our coffee hour to be plentiful, and our endowments to be large!
 - We want nice houses, good cars, designer clothes and shoes, all in an amazing walk-in closet!
 - It's hard not to feel the pull of these things.
 - I feel this in my campus ministry work, too.
 - I want to have a ton of students, be super popular, have the best swag (available in the narthex...) and I want all of that to happen now!
 - But, I gotta listen to Jesus and remember that that's not what this is all about.
 - This thing we are doing here, it's about a way of life, a new way of seeing.
 - That's what Jesus is inviting this man to consider.
 - He's trying to get him to let God's truth sink into his heart and soul, to let it move from the outside in, so that the idea of giving away what he owns in service of others is no longer scary or shocking or unthinkable.
 - He's asking him to enter into God's definition of success: opening up his heart to live in service of the neighbor.

- This is what I want my students at campus ministry to learn.
 - I have to continually remind myself that it's not about how many students show up, how impressive our programs are, or how much "fun" we have.
 - If we (yes we! You are included in this ministry, by supporting us through your prayers and donations)... If we can start to get students in the Jesus-mindset, allowing our teachings and practices to foster a life lived on behalf of others... If we can do that for even just ONE student, that is enough.
 - That is success.
- And the same goes for you, here at Saint Andrew's.
 - You are also in the business of changing hearts and minds.
 - You keep showing up because together as followers of Christ we are constantly seeking to conform our values to Christ's, to re-define how we understand ourselves, our institutions, and our place in the world. (As painful and imperfect as that may be, and we may be at it!)
 - It's not about the fame and fortune, the money or the stuff, the influence or popularity we might hold.
 - It's not about following the rules for the rules' sake, trying to show God how good we are.
 - None of that is necessary.
 - As we Lutherans like to say, we are saved by grace through faith.
 - What Jesus offers the man, his disciples, and us here is a moment of grace.
 - You can stop playing the game, he's saying.
 - Stop trying to be best, biggest, most together, richest, thinnest, most generous, most dedicated, most perfect, most anything!
 - And enter into grace, trusting that God's love and mercy is all that we need and the only judgement that matters.
 - The rest, living out our faith in love and service, will follow.
- I learned something interesting about that whole "camel through the needle" thing this week.
 - The Greek word for "camel" is from the same root as "ship's cable," or large rope used to anchor a ship.
 - And from early on in Christian history, there's been speculation that the word we have been handed down, "camel," is not the right one.
 - Perhaps, the passage should read: "It is easier for a thick rope to go through the eye of a needle..."
 - Still seems as impossible as a camel, right?
 - But actually, it is... a thick rope or cable would need to be unwound, pulled apart, string by string, until it was finally small enough to fit through the needle.
 - What if THAT is what Jesus is describing about what this rich man needs?
 - An unbinding, unwinding, a loosening-up from all the false values of the world that have a hold on him.
 - And what if that's what he is saying to us, too?
 - Can we learn to let go of those deceptive markers of success and learn a new way, based on grace and love and care for each other?
 - With God's help, we can and we will.
 - Thanks be to God. Amen.