

*17As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 18Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" 20He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." 21Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." 22When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.*

*23Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" 24And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." 26They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" 27Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."*

*28Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." 29Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, 30who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. 31But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."*

I remember my fifth grade teacher. She liked me, I think. Most all of my teachers liked me. They never said so, but isn't it interesting how we know that - when someone likes us. Or doesn't.

I don't think she said what she said that day to hurt me. But what she said did hurt me.

I can't remember the context or even her exact words. But I remember so well what those words did to me, how they burned into my heart.

"You're rich," she said. "Schlessmans are rich". In front of the whole class she labeled me in that way.

It was not a compliment. It was more like saying you do not understand what life is like for everyone else here. You are not like the rest of us, with the rest of us. You don't have the troubles we have; you're rich.

Before that day that label had never been attached to me or my family. From that day on I always felt lonelier.

Most of us today will hear the sermon about the man who had many possessions and we will think about someone else, someone we would label: rich. I find myself doing it as I think about preaching this sermon. It is about them - rich people.

Though other gospels would label this man right from the beginning as rich, or as a ruler, Mark calls him simply a man. Let's try to see him that way. And our neighbors who happen to have more money than we, could we see them that way also as people - simply people.

*The man ran up to Jesus and knelt before him. Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

I hope all of you are asking that question with him. It is the most important question that can be asked.

He did not ask what he could do to earn eternal life, but to inherit. Children inherit.

Jesus answered with quoting the Ten Commandments: "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother." But Jesus also added one more: "You shall not defraud." And Jesus did not mention the commands about coveting nor the ones that have to do with God.

The man replied that he had kept these from his youth. Most people do.

And then we read, *Jesus, looking at him loved him and said, "You lack one thing, go, sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, then come, follow me."* When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving for he had many possessions.

How easy to think: Well, that should make the rich people squirm. And maybe it should.

But there is one little phrase in this that we need to think about a whole lot.

Jesus looking at him loved him.

I looked it up. In the first three gospels this is the only time it says that Jesus loved someone - this man. In the fourth gospel, John, we do read that Jesus loved Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. And that gospel is written, we think, by the one described as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." But that is it, the only times in the whole of the New Testament that it says Jesus loved someone.

*Jesus looking at him loved him and said: "Go sell what you own and give the money to the poor and come, follow me."*

I think of all the things that I have demanded of my children that I would never ask of someone else's children. A deeper love is the reason. I don't want those whom I love just to slip by. I want them to be the very best people they can be.

Jesus loved him, Jesus did not want him to miss out on what was most important. Jesus did not want this man's life to be about stuff.

I know what owning a house does to me - mowing the lawn, painting the trim, cleaning, washing windows, on and on, a house could keep someone from living.

Wealth can also - getting it, keeping it, using it to make all the efforts worthwhile can consume a lifetime. Wealth might become so important that it would begin to determine the circle of friends, keep someone from being neighbor, finding a brother in someone in prison, a brother to visit. Wealth could keep someone from seeing a poor woman as a sister, someone whose opinion matters.

Jesus loved him, knew that here was a man who was in danger of gaining the whole world and losing his soul.

*"Go, sell what you have and give to the poor and come follow me."*

Jesus did not say, "Come, give your wealth to our treasury, support my ministry and come with me."

Jesus did not set up a foundation for alleviating poverty.

The money was not important to Jesus here - but that this man whom Jesus loved would be freed from his money was important to Jesus.

Your life is not about stuff - not about accumulating - not about the status or honor that wealth brings. Your life is in Jesus.

When we have lots of stuff, lots of status and honor how easy to get lost in it all!

Jesus looks at you, loves you. Jesus does not want you to miss the life of following him.

One of the issues for Martin Luther was that Jesus was calling all people, not just some. He spoke of the priest hood of all believers.

In the Roman Catholic Church only some are understood to be religious. Everything Jesus speaks is for them. But most people are not expected to give all they have to the poor and come follow Jesus.

At the end of our gospel today is an interesting exchange. The disciples say, *“Look we have left everything and followed you. And Jesus said, Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and the sake of the good news who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age - houses, brother and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions - and in the age to come eternal life.*

How are the religious addressed in the Roman Catholic Church: Father, brother, mother, sister.

But if Luther was right Jesus' word is to each of you, not just for others. Jesus loves you with the very same love that he loved this man who knelt before him. Jesus wants you to follow in the very situations where you are. Jesus does not want you owned by wealth or status or your dreams, Jesus wants you to be his own - his sister, brother.

Jesus loves you. Jesus intends to accomplish the impossibility of saving you, the very thing that is impossible for humans, but accomplished in the death and resurrection of the only Son of God.

I know this for certain, that when you follow in faith God has loving and giving and serving in store for you that is beyond your wildest imagining. And every time you turn away from the one who gave his life to claim yours, it is a deep sadness.

Sisters, brothers, you are a holy people, you are a royal priesthood, you are the children of God.