

11 October 09 19 Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 10:17-31

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What must I do to inherit eternal life.

We have probably all been touched by the terrible tragedies that have been happening around the world and close to home. Like the floods and mud slides in the Philippines and the earthquake in Indonesia. I must admit though I shed a few tears at the Samoan Tsunami, having only been there a few months ago and seeing the hotel we stayed in totally destroyed and knowing that the people in the local village depended on it for their existence. Knowing how friendly and care free they were, seeing their world shattered is heart breaking. My first reaction was, I want to go and help, but that of course was not practical, I have to do my help from here. And then there is the disappearance of little Ashling from Auckland, it would be impossible not to be moved as you listen to the anguish of her mother and father pleading for anyone who knows where she is to bring her home safely. Big stories that can touch our hearts, too big for us to be able to fix, too far away for us to be of practical help, we can help financially but there are many more tragedies in our own neighbourhoods, communities and workplaces. How are our hearts touched, how generous are we with our time, money possessions, our prayers, our love? Or do we just let tragedies brush past us, not allowing them to invade our personal lives.

There was a new group in town offering some out of this world benefits and there was a man who had everything and who wanted to be part of this group. He was pretty sure that he had all the right credentials to belong so, like an excited schoolboy he went running up to the leader of the group and said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' The leader, Jesus, tells him and like a questionnaire where you tick off all the boxes, the man said, 'yes, I've done all that'. Imagine his excitement when he thought he had passed because he had answered all the questions correct!! But similar to your driving test, after you have passed you get the bill, there is a cost to being part of Jesus' group. The cost what Jesus said to the man was, 'sell everything you have and follow me'. The man was very rich and said, WOW, that would hurt, you can't really mean that Jesus. But Jesus did. This is a story that would have thrown the disciples too, confused them, because in those days a prosperous man meant that he had done what is right, was living a good and righteous life, that is why he was so

successful, if you weren't living a good life you didn't prosper. What was Jesus talking about. We know the man walked sadly away forgoing the eternal riches that Jesus could give him to keep his riches in this world, the cost was greater than his passion or his heart to follow Jesus. And our hearts can't be hidden from Jesus, like it says in the Hebrew's reading, 'The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account'. Heb 4:12. Jesus knew the man's heart, he knew that he was a good man, he hadn't done any harm but he hadn't done any good either, Jesus knew that the man's possessions would always have more of a hold over him than doing God's work. Do we have to give up all our possessions to follow Jesus? Not necessarily, many disciples stayed in their own homes but we do have to have a serious look at what holds us back from following Jesus. The story of the rich man is an extreme example, but a very realistic one, it is a wakeup call for us, a challenge for us to be aware of what blocks us from being true followers of Jesus, to be aware of the things that we hold more important and put first before God. Material possessions can be a stumbling block to our following Jesus, he said, 'that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God'. Possessions fix our thoughts in the world, blinding us from the vision of the kingdom, they encourage us to put a monetary value on things and make us deaf to the plight of the poor. And how did we get the possessions in the first place, was it to the detriment of someone else.

We were ripped off by a person in Vietnam, at first we were a little indignant, it was something like 2,000 dong, sounds a lot but when we worked it out it was only 20cents and we also found out the average pay was \$1 a day, we decided to be a little more generous spirited after that, we were lucky enough to travel there the least we could do was help the people who lived and worked there. How easy it was though, to be possessive over a few cents.

I wonder how many people have given up on the journey of eternal life because it has got to demanding, because they had to give up some of their dreams and ambitions, give up the good life, or that going to church on Sunday was getting in the way of their sport or hobby, they had to give up their power or their pride. God knows it is not easy, right back in history, Adam and Eve were asked only

to not eat of the fruit of one tree and they couldn't do it, how many more temptations do we have before us.

The disciples asked, 'then who can be saved?' Jesus replies, 'For mortals it is impossible but not for God; for God all things are possible'.

For us it is impossible but not for God, God is not out to trip us up but to guide us, so the answer is to keep close to God, reading, listening to and meditating on the word of God, living our lives focused on God and not expecting earthly rewards, and then the word of God will work like a two edged sword, dividing soul from spirit, judging the intentions of our hearts and redirecting us.

What must we do to inherit eternal life?

Do what the rich man did, ask Jesus, then listen to what needs to be changed in our lives, what needs to be let go of, what we need to do. A good way to start asking is with this morning's sentence from psalm 139, Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.