

*Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost*

October 27, 2013

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 18:18-27

*A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." (NIV)*

"I have some good news and I have some bad news. What do you want to hear first - the good news or the bad news?" I'm sure someone has said this to you at one time or another. How do you reply? I usually say give me the bad news first because I want to end with the good news. Yet, you want to know both don't you? If what you are hearing is true, you may need to hear both. You need the bad news so you know with what you are dealing. You want to understand the problem. And who doesn't need to hear some good news once in a while?

In a spiritual sense we also need to hear both the bad news and the good news. In fact, without the bad news, the good news might just end up sounded like plain old news to us. So for the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to just how good the news God has for us really is, the Holy Spirit needs the bad news to show us just how bad things really are for us. Throughout God's Word we find this bad news and good news. These are the two main doctrines of the Bible. We have the law and the gospel. Jesus was a master at preaching them both. I pray we always listen to His Word. Today, I pray we listen carefully as Jesus teaches a rich ruler so we understand: **Jesus must make us sad before He makes us really glad.** We are sad when we see what is impossible for us. We are really glad when we see our God has done the impossible.

A certain ruler, perhaps a political leader or a ruler in one of the synagogues, comes to Jesus with a question. He asks, "*Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" The Jews would not use the word "good" to normally describe teachers or rabbis, for that was a word for God alone. But Jesus sees right through the flattery for if this man thought Jesus was true God, as Jesus is, he would have already been following Jesus. So Jesus answered, "*Why do you call me good?...No one is good--except God alone.*" Jesus also recognizes the flaw in this ruler's question. You do not do something to inherit something. How often don't we still see this flawed thinking today? He thinks heaven is something he could earn. He wants to know what he has to do to get into a good standing with God. What are the requirements for salvation? What must he "*do to inherit eternal life?*"

Jesus says he knows God's commands. He is not to steal, murder, or commit adultery. He is not to lie, slander, or do anything to give others a bad name. He was to obey his parents in everything and give them proper love and respect. I don't know about you, but at this point

in Jesus' talk my face would be looking at the ground. I would be shaking my head in shame and embarrassment. But did you hear this guy's answer? **"All these I have kept since I was a boy."** Say what! He says he has kept all these commands since he was young. Really? He always obeyed his parents and with a smile on his face. He never told a lie. He never looked lustfully at someone other than his wife. This man needed to hear some bad news. He needed the law. He needed the law to do what the law does so well – the law crushes and condemns. It silences every mouth.

So, **"when Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'"** Jesus knew what was in this man's heart. He had great wealth and there were times when this wealth came before God did. So Jesus tells him to give it all up and then follow Him. Do you see what Jesus revealed by this command? This man who claimed to keep all God's commands couldn't even get past the very first one! He had another god – his money. He was far from perfect. He was not holy like God demands. He did not please God nor could he do a thing to make amends for his sins. Jesus was teaching him that he could not save himself – it would be easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than for him to be saved. In fact, with man doing something to inherit eternal life is impossible. **"When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth."** The bad news, the law, did its job. Jesus made this ruler sad. Jesus needed to make this ruler sad because he needed to see the truth that he was a sinner. He needed to see the truth that he needed a Savior.

Jesus also wants to make us sad. We need to hear bad news because we like to build ourselves up in our own minds. We like to walk around like we are good people. We like to think we have done enough to make God happy with us. Have we perhaps stopped being sad about our sin? If so, dear friends, we are treading on very dangerous ground! Then we need to listen to Jesus' words. Listen to His law and see how we put worldly things ahead of God. Recognize we have not been the husbands we should be, or the wives we ought to be, or the children God demands us to be. We have not been very good workers, friends, or neighbors. God's law points out there are so many things we do that God says we are not to do. We see there are so many things that God tells us to do that we don't do. God's law makes it clear the only thing we have earned is hell. How can we not walk away from God's law feeling sad? Now we want to do something to save ourselves and inherit eternal life? We can't even make it to first base! It is impossible for us for God demands perfection and we are sinners. Like the crowd standing near Jesus the law leaves asking: **"Who then can be saved?"**

How would we answer this question? This is an important question to say the least. **"Who then can be saved?"** We start by admitting the truth Jesus gives us today. That with man this is impossible. We can't do it. We need help. We need mercy. But there is a reason Jesus wants to bring us to this point. There is a reason Jesus makes us sad. There is a reason Jesus turns us away from ourselves and the things we do. Jesus wants to make us really glad. That is why even though it would be easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than for us to be saved, you and I are saved. We will inherit eternal life.

Why? Did you catch Jesus' answer about who can be saved? **Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."** What was impossible for us God has done! God did the impossible. He saved us. The good news points to God doing the impossible time and time again for us and for our salvation. Can you think of examples of God doing the impossible so we are able to inherit eternal life? A virgin will be with child and give birth to a

Son. That's impossible! God did it. God can not die because that it impossible. God became fully human and God died. He went to a cross to die so that His sacrifice would count for everyone. The Son of God died to pay for all sin. God did the impossible. When someone dies and is in the grave for three days they do not come out again alive. That's impossible. God did the impossible because Jesus grave is empty. God did the impossible by saving sinners.

God continues to do the impossible. Through water and the word all our sins are washed away and we become children of God. Through bread and wine Jesus give us His own body and blood as a personal covenant that all our sins are forgiven. That's impossible. It is for men, but God keeps doing the impossible. God has broken through our hearts of stone and our hearts now belong to Him. We love God and His Word. We want to obey – even His law. For God has given us good news. We are right with God and all our sins have been forgiven. Heaven is now our home. For Jesus is our Savior. Doesn't Jesus makes us really glad?

We never hear about this rich ruler again in the Bible who walks away sad. He needed to walk away sad because trusting in what he had done would only earn his entrance into hell. I wonder if later on, if he was a ruler of a synagogue, he heard the good news when Jesus' disciples went into the world telling everyone. I wonder if he heard the message that this same Jesus who preached the law so well to him suffered, died, and rose again to save him. I wonder if he later met Jesus again in His Word and walked away really glad. I wonder if God worked faith in his heart and if we will see him in heaven too.

Well, we can't say anything for sure about this ruler, but we can talk about people we know. We have a message to tell them. There are people around us who need to hear bad news – the law needs to make them sad. There are people around you who so desperately need to hear the good news. They need to know how God has been merciful to them. They need to hear how God has done the impossible. They need to know Jesus. It is not too difficult for us. God has given us bad news and good news. I pray we tell people both. For Jesus wants to make people sad, so He can make them really glad – forever! Amen.