

“Inheritance”

Sermon on October 11, 2009

Mark 10:17-31

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Prayer – God, we ask that in your mercy you would give us ears to hear your word this morning. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our thoughts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

Over the past few weeks, we’ve begun evaluating and describing our church using a popular organizational model that asks: what are our values, what is our mission, how will we measure if we are achieving that mission, and then how will we actually go about carrying it out? Pastor Joel, for the past three weeks has outlined our values, and he begins first with God himself, moves to God’s Word, and then finishes with people. Notice some of the things that are absent: Not buildings, not money, not attendance. These things may be tools we use to carry out our mission and our values, but they are not the beginning point. And that is important, and I think you will see that in the future as we get to how we measure what it is we are doing at Hope Lutheran Church. So, throughout the rest of the discussion about mission, measurement, and how we are going to go about it, we always have to keep in mind our values. In no place along the way can we forsake our values. Everything we do must be in conformity with our values.

Holding on to our values, we are going to begin to talk this week about our mission. What are our goals? Where are we going? What, literally, is our mission? Or maybe more accurately, what is God’s mission. Our Gospel text this week provides us with a good starting place when we begin to consider our mission.

Our gospel begins with a rich young man running up to Jesus and asking what he can do to *inherit* eternal life. He is concerned with the inheritance that is to come and wants to make

sure that he is included in it. What are some of the characteristics of inheritance? First of all, the inheritance exists tangibly in the present. I'll use myself as a hypothetical example. If I am to receive an inheritance, that inheritance already exists, usually in the form of cash, stocks, real estate, etc. However, it is not in my possession, it is in the possession of my parents. That does not negate the reality that the inheritance already exists, out there somewhere. I could go and count it up and I would get a real number because it exists in hard assets. Secondly, this inheritance has already been secured, and not by myself, but by my parents. I have done nothing on my part to build up the assets that make up my inheritance. Third, inheritances are given solely at the discretion of the benefactor. The heirs can try to do things that will influence the benefactor to give them certain things, or to include themselves in the inheritance, but ultimately who receives the inheritance is at the sole discretion of the benefactor. And fourth, an inheritance is a future event. Though the assets that will one day make up that inheritance will one day be mine, they are not so right now. It is something that will happen in the future.

Hopefully as I am describing these characteristics of inheritance you are seeing the parallels between the inheritance which God promises us through Jesus Christ. The Bible often uses the language of inheritance to describe the gift that we are to one day receive from God on account of Jesus Christ. Hear these words from Hebrews chapter 9:

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

The rich young man comes to Jesus knowing that he is the one who can help him receive the inheritance. However, he thinks that there is something that he can do to make sure that he receives it. After 2000 years of Christian faith, and about 500 years of Lutheranism, we know

that there is nothing we can *do* earn God's favor. Jesus surely knew this as well, and so he lists of an impossible list of things that the young man must do: keep the commandments: Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother. Surprisingly, sort of, the young man says that he has kept all of them. Apparently he was not at the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus said over and over again, you have heard it said, but I say to you... "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." This young man doesn't get it, but notice that Jesus lovingly (v. 21) tries to help him understand.

So, perhaps to drive the point home that this young man can't do anything, he tells him, "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." The young man says he can't do this. But here is my question to you: of the two answers Jesus gives, which is easier: To keep all the commandments or to go sell all of your possessions? It seems clear to me that the easy thing to do is to go and sell everything. That's a one-time event. Keeping all the commandments is a call to perfection. The point may be that the rich young man can no more keep all of the commandments than he can sell all of his possessions to the poor. There is nothing he can do to receive the inheritance. The disciples also kind of miss the point. After hearing Jesus tell say all these things, they get quite worried: "The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, 'Who then can be saved?'" Jesus again places the emphasis back on grace, saying that "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

Likewise, there is nothing we can do to receive that same inheritance from Jesus. We receive the inheritance only by grace through faith. But here's the paradox: we are still called to those things that Jesus had said are impossible. We are still called to keep the commandments, not in order to receive the inheritance, but because we have already been promised it. The inheritance *frees* us to keep God's commandments.

Think of it this way: let's say I am guaranteed to receive a \$100 million inheritance. Do I need to scrimp and save and worry about my IRA or my 401k and calculate whether or not I will one day have enough money to retire? Of course not! Any amount that I would be able to save on my own would still be miniscule in relation to the inheritance. The inheritance would swallow up and overwhelm any of my work to save up for my own retirement. It would be nothing more than a drop in the bucket.

How much more so does the inheritance that we have been promised to receive free us to act in a different way than if we were trying to do this all on our own? There is no price tag that we can place upon it. In the words of Isaiah (64:6) to try to secure it ourselves leaves us with nothing more than filthy rags.

Because we are guaranteed the inheritance, we are now freed to serve God and serve one another. God has done the work to secure our future, so we are now free to live for others in the present. We are freed to share our inheritance with others.

Here's why this matters for mission: over the next three weeks we are going to talk about some of the ways which we are called to share this inheritance with others, about what God has called us to. We're going to talk about how the inheritance that God has secured for us breaks into our present world through the church and how we are called with living out of the security of our inheritance and leaving deposits of faith, hope, and love wherever we are and wherever we go.

But it we are only freed to do the work that we are called to because God has already secured our inheritance in Jesus Christ. May it be so in our lives and in this church.

Prayer – Almighty God, by your grace grant us the faith to be heirs of your inheritance, that in your promise of life to come we may be freed from the bondage of sin and death to serve you and our neighbor in faith, hope, and love. Be with us as this church strives to live out that calling in faith. In the name of him who has secured our inheritance, Jesus Christ, Amen.