

+ In Nomine Jesu +

Mark 10:17-22

Date: October 13, 2024

Liturgical Date: Pentecost 21B (Proper 23)

Title: Delight in the commandments

*In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit*

Hallelujah! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments! The commandments of the Lord are a delight for the faithful. To study the commandments, meditate upon them, and live out the commandments is the true endeavor of those who fear the Lord. The commandments of the Lord even enlighten the heart, which shines forth in grace, mercy, and generosity towards others.

The commandments of God are to be taught to the faithful. Moses instructed Israel with the word of the Lord, “You shall therefore love the Lord your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always.” St. Paul taught concerning the holy life of the saints, “For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.””

The Lord on Mt. Sinai spoke to Israel all of his commandments. The Lord sends various rules and regulations to his people, as Moses records in Leviticus. The rules cover sexuality, father and mother, vengeance, fraud, stealing, child sacrifice, and providing for the poor. At the end of the rules, the Lord summarizes them, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” But at the beginning, the Lord prefaces these commandments by speaking through Moses, “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.”

If a person does them, he shall live by them. Not just be alive and well, but live with the blessings that God has promised. At the end of Deuteronomy, the Lord brings together obedience to the commandments, life, and the promised land, which for Israel was rest. “If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.”

And as Jesus was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” This man had desired life with God. He saw God as the source of life. Nobody else could provide what this man was looking for, except God. If he caught the end of Jesus speaking about the kingdom of God, the man’s ears would have been thirsting for more. So the man puts his feet into high gear and runs after Jesus.

Jesus had finished teaching about God’s work in creation, how he made them male and female. The two would become one flesh, so that man would not separate that union through divorce. Divine truths, to be sure. Then children were coming to Jesus. Here Jesus taught,

“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God promises something more than what this earthly life entails. The kingdom of God brings something more than what our eyes see. The kingdom of God endures longer than the time we have to draw breaths on this earth. Jesus promises something new, something that lasts. And the man wants some of that. Who else would promise something so great besides a Good Teacher? What answers does this Good Teacher have concerning eternal life? So the man runs.

Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Now, we could easily throw on our Lutheran thinking caps and say, “What a bad question... doesn’t he know it’s faith alone and grace alone... there is no do.” But this man has been a student of Moses. And Moses writes about obeying the commandments, about doing them and you will live by them.

Moses, at the end of Deuteronomy puts both sides of the commandments in front of Israel. If you obey them you shall live, but if you turn from them you shall surely perish. Israel was the example of turning and perishing. Israel hardened their hearts. Israel tested God. Israel went astray. Israel did not know the Lord’s ways. Therefore the Lord swore in his wrath, “They shall not enter my rest.” Israel would perish.

But the man considers he is not Israel. He will learn from this teacher what Israel did not learn from the Lord. Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” A question is answered by another question. God gave the commandments at Sinai. With all of the commandments there was the conditional - do this and you will live. Who would give them life? God would give them life, and he alone.

Since God alone gives life, the man comes with a premise. This teacher can teach the way to life, can’t he? The man’s question is such a big question. It’s about eternal life. Why bother just a man with a question about eternal life? Would human wisdom provide a path to life that has no end? Is there a moral code or a system of strict practices that a man could teach that would lead to eternal life? Impossible.

No one is good except God alone. No one can give life except God alone. God himself put the path before Israel. Walk in my ways. Keep my commandments. You shall live and multiply. No commandments or rules could be more perfect than that which the Lord gave to Israel. No promise could be so rich as rest in the land that he was giving to them. But Israel’s heart hardened. And they perished.

As soon as the man may have thought, “So you’re saying there’s a chance,” Jesus answers. The man receives the answer he thinks he was looking for. “You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” In some ways, a better deal than Israel had. Israel was to obey all of the commandments. Here, the second table of the law. How do you deal with your neighbor, whom you can see?

Even if these commandments are taken narrowly, they present a high standard. Do not put anyone to death. Do not fornicate before marriage, and no cheating or divorce afterwards. Do not take another's possessions whether great or small. Do not speak ill against anyone, friend or foe. Do not rob or cheat someone out of their stuff. And respect your father and mother. A person perhaps could put on the appearance of mostly keeping most of those. A nice guy could pull it off, at least in the judgment of others.

The man must be that "nice guy." "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." This is the test? I ached it, the man replies. I have guarded these commandments as something precious to live out. Where these commandments have instructed me to do this, I have done so. While others confess, "Remember not the sins of my youth," I did keep the commandments even as a young man. The question is answered then. I have done the commandments. I will live.

The man is so wrong. He hasn't kept the commandments. He will never keep the commandments. He will not live. He will perish. Jesus knows the truth. And like a true shepherd, he looks at this sheep so wayward. Jesus looks with love. The Lord does not want anyone to perish. There will be an answer about eternal life.

Jesus looks at the man with love. Jesus knows the man is falling short of the commandments - and short of eternal life. Jesus does not give the man soft pillows to console him - You are so close to eternal life. What a great attitude you have. A little more trying, and you will have found eternal life. No, there's no soft pillows here. No comfort for the man. Jesus sees the heart. It's always the heart.

You lack one thing. Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor. Keeping the commandments is still required of the faithful. But there is one place you are falling short. Your heart desires something other than God. Your heart is leading you to disregard God's law. God regards the poor. He instructs the faithful to be mindful of the poor and provide for their needs. For this man, he must put the needs of the poor above his heart's love for his possessions.

Does the man consider the first table of the law as well as he did the second table? Does the man trust that God would still provide for him even if he sold all that he had and gave to the poor? Or does he trust his money to hoard it for himself and not provide for others in need? He lacks in this one thing. The treasures you have on earth are only that - on earth, for a while. You ask about eternal life yet love the things that do not last for eternity. You asked to be rich into the ages but could not give up your riches in this age.

You will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. The way to eternal life is not the "what must I do" way. And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. Come, follow me. To the cross, to death. To the tomb. To eternal life.

The answer to "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" is Jesus. Jesus points out the desire in the man's heart. The man, who was so proud of his guarding all of the commandments from his youth, is left with nothing. Whatever he was going to do to inherit

eternal life came crashing down when the desire of his heart was exposed. But the purpose of his question does have realization.

Follow Jesus. The man did not realize the terrors of the law until it cut directly to his heart. The man's desire was for his money and not for the poor. The man's desire would lead to death, not life. Follow Jesus, to the cross. Jesus is put to death to overcome the terrors the law brings. Who doesn't have that desire in their heart for something other than what God demands in his law? Follow Jesus, and the conscience that is terrorized by the law will be calmed by the blood of Jesus from the cross. Follow Jesus for eternal life.

Jesus deals with the man with grace and mercy. Jesus offers the man treasures in heaven - life eternal, a rest in heaven - like the rest Israel would have in the promised land, but, even better, an eternal rest. Jesus offers to this poor man a treasure much greater than what he would not give to the poor.

As part of following Jesus, the faithful live according to the commandments. The commandments are not jettisoned because they are not necessary for eternal life. Jesus is necessary for eternal life, not the commandments. But, Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments! The commandments are still the guide for everyone who follows Jesus. To follow Jesus is to inherit eternal life through Jesus' death. From that, we fear the Lord and delight in his commandments.

All of the commandments that Jesus listed still stand for his followers. We learn more about the commandments in the catechism. We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need. Our neighbor includes the unborn, and we should use our voice to protect the life of the unborn.

We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do. We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way. We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation. We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them. And to live according to those commandments is a delight.

But what of that man who inquired of Jesus? Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. For now, the man goes away after being cut to the heart. It happens. Sometimes a word of admonition is not received, even when spoken in love. The man goes away and does not follow Jesus. Let this be an instruction to us to receive admonitions to turn from our sinful desires with repentant hearts and continue to follow Jesus.

+ Soli Deo Gloria +

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