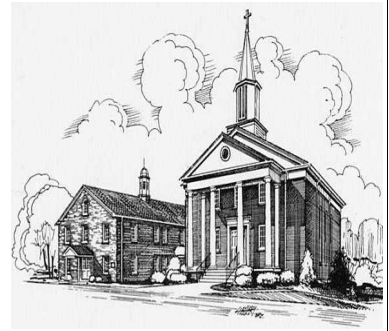


**The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Sunday closest to October 12**

**Proper 23
Year B
RCL**



Amos 5:6-7, 10-15
Psalm 90:12-17
Mark 10:17-31

The Collect

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Amos 5:6-7,10-15

Seek the LORD and live,
or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire,
and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it.
Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood,
and bring righteousness to the ground!
They hate the one who reproves in the gate,
and they abhor the one who speaks the truth.
Therefore because you trample on the poor
and take from them levies of grain,
you have built houses of hewn stone,
but you shall not live in them;
you have planted pleasant vineyards,
but you shall not drink their wine.
For I know how many are your transgressions,
and how great are your sins –
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,
and push aside the needy in the gate.
Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time;
for it is an evil time.
Seek good and not evil,
that you may live;
and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you,
just as you have said.
Hate evil and love good,
and establish justice in the gate;
it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts,
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Psalm 90:12-17 Page 718, BCP

Domine, refugium

- 12 So teach us to number our days
that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.
- 13 Return, O LORD; how long will you tarry?
be gracious to your servants.
- 14 Satisfy us by your loving-kindness in the morning;
so shall we rejoice and be glad all the days of our life.
- 15 Make us glad by the measure of the days that you afflicted us
and the years in which we suffered adversity.
- 16 Show your servants your works
and your splendor to their children.
- 17 May the graciousness of the LORD our God be upon us;
prosper the work of our hands;
prosper our handiwork.

Mark 10:17-31

As Jesus 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?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You 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.’” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” 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.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples,

“How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It 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.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” 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 for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age – houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecu-

tions – and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

SERMON

One of my worst subjects in law school was contracts. Contracts was taught by Professor Hamm, a man of settled habit. By that I mean that he gave exactly the same lecture on exactly the same day of every semester. This provided a profit opportunity for the upperclassmen, who sold first year students “Hamm-o-grams”, their outlines of each of Professor Hamm’s lectures. The belief was that since the only measure of success lay in receiving a passing grade in the course, participation in the lectures was not necessary and cutting corners in this way was not only acceptable, but a strategic move. An awful lot of folks I run into think this way about their religious lives, that the only measure of success lies in receiving a “passing grade” at the end. I would humbly suggest that the Kingdom of God is nothing like Professor Hamm’s contracts course. Participation

matters in the Kingdom of God. Commitment matters.

The remaining question is this: what do participation and commitment look like?

Here's an uncomfortable question for you: What brings you here today? What do you seek? Why are you spending a perfectly good day off here, of all places? Is it habit? We just celebrated 60 years of gathering here on Sunday morning. That's a long established habit. Do you come here to scratch an itch habit has imposed? Maybe it's the music? Jeanette plays so beautifully, perhaps that's it? Or a sense of obligation, perhaps? Church attendance when I was a child was not up for discussion. It's Sunday. You go to church on Sunday. Never mind that I hadn't the least idea what was being preached, nor why it could possibly be important enough to drag me out of a warm bed. It's Sunday. You are going to church. That's what decent people did in

the 1950's. Children don't speculate about uncomfortable questions, but now we're grownups. What brings you here?

Our account from Mark today suggests one possible answer to that uncomfortable question.

As Jesus 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?”

I love this guy. I really love him. Mark describes him as just “a man”. Matthew calls him a “young man”¹. Luke calls him “a ruler”², i.e. an important man in the community. Whoever he is, the important thing about him lies in his question, “What must I **do** to inherit eternal life?” He'd heard of Jesus' teaching about eternal life and that sounded good to him. Well, why wouldn't it? That's a pretty snazzy bargain. He's approaching it in

1 Matthew 19:20

2 Luke 18:18

exactly the way a merchant might. He is drawn to Jesus out of a desire for something he wishes to have. What must he do to secure it? Let the negotiations begin. If I had been around at the time, I might have sold him a “God-o-gram”.

The first thing Jesus has to clear up is the idea that eternal life is something which can be obtained by human effort.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ... “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It 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.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

When we think of eternal life as something to be attained by a good score at the final exam, we inevitably

conclude that the final grade is all that matters and we're back in Professor Hamm's contracts class. There must be something more than just totaling up what we have done. Life in God's creation must include participation – walking with Him through it to reflect God's love into a damaged world – and commitment, a transformation of our innermost selves from a posture of seeking what is to our benefit to a posture of service to all God's creation. To do so, we must be transformed from isolated little egos seeking out our own welfare into citizens of the Kingdom. Hamm-o-grams might offer confidence in a passing grade at the final, but no one was ever transformed by a Hamm-o-gram. Attending law school is intended to transform a muddled thinker into a reasoning lawyer. That's a big transformation, and it can't be done by paying forty bucks for a Hamm-o-gram. Lectures have to be lived through and struggled

with. Life is the same. Life must be participated in or it is meaningless. If my mind and heart are not focused on God's great love for me despite my sins, and on spreading that awareness to the world in which I live, have I not failed God grievously?

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money³ to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

Here's something you wouldn't know from reading the text in English. The phrase "the money" doesn't appear in the Greek. The text in Greek is

"You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

Jesus isn't telling the man how to buy his way into heaven by showing generosity to the disadvantaged. He

3 The Greek lacks "the money"

isn't being told to make a grand gesture toward the poor with the proceeds of his wealth, and thereby get his ticket to heaven punched. He is being told to be transformed by divesting himself of his possessions because his commitment to wealth is a millstone about his neck. The young man who approached Jesus saw his many possessions as his salvation. They were what made his life comfortable. His wealth had become his god. We know this because he went away grieving. His commitment to his wealth was stronger than his desire for what Jesus was teaching. The passage isn't about money. It's about idolatry. It's about that which stands between a person and God. Until the young man turns his back on that which stands between him and God, he cannot follow Jesus.

To enter the Kingdom of God, we must be transformed, rather than confirmed in our own ideas of right-

eousness. We must become a new creation. One who enters the Kingdom of God is charged with restoration of creation to its state before sin entered and broke it. That can't be done if you insist on dragging your idols, your wealth and security, along with you. The “Kingdom of God” does not mean heaven when you die. The Kingdom of God is to be lived within now. When Jesus told the young man to “follow me”, Jesus wasn’t leading toward a pleasant retirement, but to the rocky path of transformation. That rocky path leads us away from confirmation of our righteousness. It leads us away from “How does this benefit me?” to “How can I restore that which has been damaged?”

You cannot pursue wealth and comfort AND serve God. You cannot act from divided loyalties without being false to one or the other. God made it simple for us.

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Participation matters.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

When we speak of our commitment as Christians, there are no corners which can be cut. Each of the original twelve (with the exception of John) died martyr's deaths. The result of those deaths was not a hateful war on non-Christians. There was no seeking for revenge. It is that commitment, that refusal to cut corners, that is the distinguishing mark of a Christian. Remember that the next time someone urges you to hate Muslims.

Until we meet again

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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