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21st Sunday after Pentecost
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Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Mark 10:23-31

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Every once in a while, we wake up and we realize, to our great surprise, we aren't God.

Something happens, catches us off guard, and we notice that maybe we were wrong.
Maybe we broke something, or someone, and it can't be fixed.

Every once in a while, we feel like there's something missing,
something more than us,
something bigger—even better!

And when these rare feelings and thoughts come to us, what do we do?

We have that strange urge, or feeling, or desire to be with God.
We want to somehow join ourselves to Him.
But how?

It seems there are three main ways we try to reach God, to become a part of Him:

Mysticism: Exciting the will—perfection by spiritual experience.

Gnosticism: Attaining the knowledge—perfection by reason,

Moralism: Increasing the power—perfection by works,

In all of these, we see God's perfection within our reach.
If I only do...*this*, then I'll be good with God.

Each of these three ways of reaching God tempts us on a daily basis.

Mysticism may be the most common today.
Mysticism emphasizes the feelings, the desires—what many today call *spirituality*.

We're tempted towards mysticism when we're led to trust our subjective *feeling of God*.
It all becomes so personal, so indescribable, and otherworldly.

And there are certain methods one follows to achieve this mysticism:
for some it's an escape from this world, like a monk in a monastery—
away from people, away from the busy-ness, away from the stress of it all.
For others it's a series of repetitive mantras, spoken over and over until the mind drifts.

When the Spirit is *felt* in a certain way we call it a *spiritual high*.
It feels good—that's why we keep seeking these sorts of mystical experiences.

Often these experiences strengthen our faith, which is certainly a good thing.
But mysticism comes when we trust the experience or the feeling instead of the Lord Himself.
When we rely on our feelings instead of the Word as it's spoken.

Gnosticism isn't as popular as it once was, but we still try to reach God by *figuring Him out*.
 Very similar to rationalism, this is the attempt to know God by reason,
 to make sense of it all.

Knowledge is power, we say.
 The more you know, the closer to God you become.
 This is us trying to figure out the *why* of life.

Now, certainly knowledge is a good thing, and we should constantly be striving to know God
 through His Word.

But not everything can be so easily packaged up and fit into our minds.
 Not everything in this world makes sense.

And then lastly, there is moralism.
 This is our striving to please God.

Moralism comes in many shapes and sizes:

some try to please God by the way they live—
 it's a life of good-works, pious devotion, and close attention to right and wrong.
 Some try to please God with their wallet—
 what they earn for themselves, how they provide for their families, how they give
 to the church.
 And for others, they try to please God by the decisions they make—
 they seek recognition for deciding to follow Jesus, amongst all the other options.

Moralism is trying to reach God by way of our power:

either our hands and works,
 or our wallet and buying power,
 or our will and decision.

It's us reaching God with what we have.

And like Mysticism and Gnosticism, there are certainly good things here:

care for the neighbor,
 donations toward the Church's work,
 and a ready willingness to serve where our Lord leads.

But the common downfall is again trusting in what comes from within us.

All three attempts to reach God ultimately fail.

And that's the point of today's Gospel.

Today Jesus addresses moralism, or trying to reach God by our power, our wealth, our things.

Jesus says to His disciples:

“How difficult it will be for those who have possessions to enter the kingdom of God!”

(Mk 10:23)

This causes a bit of surprise: **“The disciples were amazed at His words”** (10:24).

So He says again,

**“How difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!
It’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”** (10:24-25)

I’m not sure where it came from, but somewhere along the way someone got the idea that this saying of Jesus had to do with a camel going through an entry gate into a city, and the difficulty one faced by stripping the camel of all it carried and helping it bow low to make the passage.

However, that’s not what Jesus said or meant.

To get a camel through the entrance of a city gate, whether difficult or not, was still possible.

For man to get into heaven, however, is impossible.
That is what Jesus is saying here.

So the disciples rightly cry out: **“Then who can be saved?”** (10:26)
And Jesus says again,

“With man it is impossible.” (10:27)

Right there, Jesus shows that Moralism is a dead end.
It goes nowhere.
You can’t get into heaven.

You can’t work your way there.
You can’t buy your way in.
You can’t decide to join or enter or anything else.
You can’t get there—

“With man it is impossible...” (10:27)

“...but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” (10:27)

This is the point:
You can’t get yourself into heaven.
You can’t make things right with God.

Not by Mysticism.
Not by Gnosticism.
Not by Moralism.

But God—
He can come to you.

And He does.

He leaves behind Father and throne;
 He comes down from heaven to earth below;
 He suffers persecution and scorn, cross, death, and burial.

He lays everything down for you.
 With Christ, the first becomes last so that the last might be first.

He makes Himself nothing so that you could be everything.

He also knows that you aren't God.
 He's in on the secret.
 He knows you fail and break things and break people.
 He knows your sin, your fear, your overwhelming burden.

And rather than giving you various steps to relieve yourself,
 He takes it all.
 He does the work.
 He comes to you.

So, for those of you who have possessions, and abilities and gifts and powers and strength,
 to those of you who have wealth, and knowledge, and great feelings,
 do not trust in these, don't rely on them, don't fear to lose them—
 for your salvation, your joining to God doesn't come from these,
 but from Christ who joins Himself to you.

And He may even join Himself to you without a mystical experience, without your *feeling* it.
 He may join Himself to you without you figuring out how.
 He may join Himself to you without and before your doing the work or the deciding or the offering.

He does it all freely.
 He does it all from love.
 Love for you.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit