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Pentecost 20

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Come and Get It!”  
Text: Mark 10:17-22

**G**race, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let's assume for the moment that this man who came up to Jesus that day and asked about eternal life really did keep all the commandments from his youth, as he said.

He really did not only not hurt or harm his neighbor in his body, but also helped and supported all his neighbors in every physical need.

He really did live a sexually pure and decent life in all he said and did.

He really did not only not take his neighbor's money or possessions, but also always helped his neighbor improve and protect his possessions and income.

He really did not only not tell lies about his neighbor, did not ever betray or slander her or hurt her reputation, but also always defended her, always spoke well of her, and always explained everything in the kindest way.

He really didn't defraud anyone, but was honest in all his dealings.

He really did honor his father and mother, served and obeyed them, loved and cherished them, without fail.

Let's assume he was this exemplary human being that he claimed to be. And that he really did all these things out of pure love for others and not for himself - for that would ruin his good works, doing them for himself, to get something for himself (like eternal life) and not really concerned for others. Jesus doesn't deny it; doesn't argue with him. So let's assume he is so. Certainly a rare human being.

What does Jesus say to him then? Basically this: *well, that's a good start*. But it's only a start. And a small one at that. So perhaps you're ready for the next step. If you really want to know what you must do to inherit eternal life, ***sell all that you have and give to the poor***. If you are as good as you think, that shouldn't be a problem. Using your wealth to help your neighbor is just an extension of what you've already been doing. Surely, you know that your treasure isn't here on earth. Surely, you know of heavenly treasure. Surely you know that you're going to die and that you can't take it with you. So don't wait until you die; do it

now. And then *come, follow me*.

Oh. Um . . . Hmmm . . . [Sigh.] He couldn't do that. Is that what it means to be good? Is that really what one must do to inherit eternal life? And *he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions*.

You see, the Law has two tables, or two parts. The second are those commandments Jesus listed today, dealing with your neighbor, loving your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39). And maybe this man was a really good person, someone everyone admired and looked up. And maybe you know someone like that. Maybe you're that way - someone people look at and say: There's a good person. You don't lie or cheat or steal. You don't kick the dog. You're faithful to your spouse and family and friends. You help others and don't hurt others. And to the world, that's not only good but enough to get you to heaven, to eternal life.

But God's Law, you see, has two parts, two tables. And it's the first part that this man had a problem with. And it's the first part that *the world* has a problem with. To *fear, love, and trust in God above all things*. Or, as it is also put: to *love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind* (Matthew 22:37). Or, to put it the way Jesus did today: that you are willing to give up anything and everything but God. Your riches, your honor . . . your life.

The world doesn't really care about that. As long as you're a good person it doesn't matter what god you believe in and worship, even no god at all. Or as the atheist society billboards and advertisements that shows up at Christmas say: *you don't need god to be good*.

Well . . . one problem with that is that the world's definition of good is constantly changing! What was once good is no longer good, and what was once not good is now considered good. And so people the world once thought good . . . they find out something they did or find a writing or a recording of something they said 20, 30, 40, 100 years ago and suddenly they aren't good anymore! Not according to the current definition of good. So they have to be fired, they have to be canceled, they have to be de-platformed. It could happen to you. Maybe it has. It's hard to live up to standards that are constantly changing!

So this man who came up to Jesus that day . . . let's assume he really was good. And what if Jesus said to him: *By jove, keep it up. You've got it!* But tomorrow, archaeologists dig up an artifact that shows something this man did then that is no longer considered good today. He owned slaves, or he used a racial slur when talking about the Gentiles or Samaritans, or he didn't pay his fair share of taxes . . . so was he good then and not good today? So, he had eternal life then but he wouldn't today? So does he or doesn't he? Is he or isn't he? Could someone live all their life thinking they are good and therefore have eternal life, when all along they weren't? *Surprise!*

Sadly that happens. But Jesus doesn't want that to happen to this man - or to anyone - He

loves him, it says. So Jesus exposes him, his heart, his idol, his false god, that thing he is not willing to let go of, that he cannot live without. For this man it was his great wealth. But what is it for you? That makes you go: *Oh. Um . . . Hmmm . . .* [Sigh.] Something you know God wants you to do, God wants you to be, but you just can't. Maybe because you love it more than God, or trust it more than God, or fear it more than God. Maybe because you can't imagine living without it. Maybe because that's where you find your meaning or value, or it's a hurt you can't let go of, or a desire you just have to fulfill. And just when you think you overcome one, another comes along and takes its place.

So this man *went away sorrowful*, because he knows he cannot do what Jesus tells him; what he must do to inherit eternal life. And it's how we must leave this place today if that's all we hear.

But you didn't come here today to kneel before Jesus and ask the question: ***Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*** You came here today to kneel before Jesus and say: *Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.* Lord, I am not, *can* not be who you want me to be. Lord, I have not, *can* not do what you want me to do. As hard as I might try. As good as the world might think me to be (or not!), my heart is like this man's. And so you do not leave sorrowful, because you hear something more. Begging for mercy, mercy is what you get. So Jesus tells you not more that you must do; you instead hear Jesus say this: *I forgive you all your sin.*

For that is the one thing you need for eternal life. That is the good that does not change. Because it is the good that comes after all that is not good - in us and in the world - is nailed with Jesus to the cross and then laid in the tomb. And all that comes out of that tomb is life. **Life** that Jesus is, and has, and now gives to you. The **good** that Jesus is, and has, and now gives to you.

And that's what Jesus wanted this man to see. So He didn't just tell this man to ***sell all that [he] has and give to the poor . . .*** but then this: ***come, follow me.*** But follow Him where? To where Jesus came to go - **to the cross**. He wants this man to see that what he needs to do for eternal life - but can't - Jesus can, and is doing for him. For Jesus is the one who kept all the commandments perfectly from His youth, and who did give all that He had - even His life on the cross - so that this man, and you, could have treasure in heaven. **You see, follow me isn't a command to obey, but an invitation to see and receive.**

So you've come here today because here is where Jesus' cross is for you. For you can't follow Jesus to a cross that happened some two thousands years ago in a land far, far away from here. But you can follow Him to where He puts His cross today for you.

His cross in the Font, for in **baptism** you die and rise with Jesus to a new life. And the first thing you hear in the Divine Service reminds you of that - that you are baptized *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. And that new and good life you need, you have received. **Gift.**

But that new and good life you haven't lived this week. So you have come to hear the words Jesus spoke from His cross: words of **forgiveness**. And you are not disappointed. He speaks them to you - *I forgive you all your sins* - and then that same Name put upon you in baptism is spoken on you again: *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. And that new and good life you need, you again receive. **Gift**.

And you followed Jesus here to **hear** that love enacted. That love spoken of and promised in the prophets, that love lived in all that Jesus said and did, and that love attested by the apostles, the eyewitnesses of Jesus dead but now living. Those words through which the Spirit of Jesus works in your heart to uproot and cast out those idols that live there; to pry them from your cold, dead hearts and give you that new and good heart you need. **Gift**.

And now you will follow Jesus to His **Supper**. *Follow*, for it is not we who do this Supper, but Jesus who does it, who is here in it and invites you to it; to eat and drink His Body and Blood - the same Body and Blood that hung upon the cross, was laid in the tomb, and then rose to life again. And so it is not dead food like the food of this world, but living food. Food for life. Food that gives you life and sustains you in the life He accomplished for you and now gives to you. **Gift**.

Gifts. Forgiveness. That's what Jesus is all about. So that you leave this place not sorrowful but joyful! For this man's question - and yours - has been answered by the cross. **What you must do Jesus did, and what you must have Jesus gives**. *What must you do to inherit eternal life?* Just this: **Come and get it!**

And then leave this place and live it. Live like your life is more than just of this world, **for it is**. Live like you really do have treasure in heaven, **for you do**. Live like you're going to live forever, **for you are**. For you have a good life, a good Lord, a good and gracious Saviour. Who doesn't change.

So what must I do? Jesus answered that questions from the cross: *It is finished* (John 19:30). It is completed. I did it. For you. **Follow Me**. Come and see. *Come and get it!*

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.