

If That is What You Really Want to Know...

Mark 10:17-22

The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, October 11, 2015

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

There is only one who is good. That would be God. If God is the only one who is good, then no one else is good by definition. If no one else is good, then you are not good. If you are not good, then you cannot ask, "What shall I do in order to inherit eternal life?"

One does not come to the Divine Service with the question, "What shall I do in order to inherit eternal life?" on your heart. If you do, you do not know what the Divine Service is for. If you do, you do not believe that God is only one who is good. If you ask, "What shall I do in order to inherit eternal life?" then you believe that you are good also. If you believed that God was the only one who is good, it would not occur to you to ask the question, "What must I do in order to inherit eternal life?"

There are some Christians who take the gifts of God and make them into good works. Take baptism for example. Baptism is by definition a gift of God. It is an event that God uses to forgive us, give us the Holy Spirit, and save us. But some people take Baptism and rather than treat it as a gift, they treat it as a good deed that we do for God. Since Jesus commands baptism and the apostles exhort us to be baptized we take these exhortations as an implication that Baptism is something that I do for God in return for his blessings. But if we view baptism in this way we must assume that we are good. And if we assume that we are good, then we by definition deny that God is the only one who is good.

Nevertheless there are people who take Baptism to be a good deed that they do for God. They view it as a hoop to jump through in order to gain everlasting salvation. People who view Baptism as a good deed want to know whether or not it is indispensable or dispensable. In other words people who think that they are good and think that Baptism is a good work want to know if Baptism is something that they should get done in order to be saved. Such people either view baptism as superfluous or optional because after all the thief on the cross was saved without it, or they view baptism legalistically as a necessity and teach that even infants who fail to be baptized go to hell. Such extreme views either exalting baptism to a place where it does not belong or denigrating it to a place where it does not belong assume that baptism is a good deed and that we are capable of doing it in order to be saved.

People associated with Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism also view Confirmation as a good deed that they accomplish. After all in order to be confirmed one has to endure Pastor's catechesis. This pastor even gives tests. It sure feels like school. In fact it is worse than school because of all of the memory work recitations. Surely that means that I have earned something. When I get confirmed I have accomplished something. Now there are some Lutherans who realize that nothing is earned before God and have their children undergo catechesis so that they are prepared to eat Christ's body and drink His blood. But there are some who believe that you earn your right to the table of the Lord and you earn it by Confirmation. Some of these people quit going to the Divine Service after Confirmation. They figure that they have earned it all and there is nothing else to earn. Others eagerly await the next thing for which they may volunteer at church in order to prove to God how good they are because they do not believe that only God is good.

Now if you are going to do something in order to earn eternal life you had better be doing something of more moral value than being baptized and confirmed. After all what does baptism accomplish for God? What does baptism accomplish for your neighbor? Does baptism feed your neighbor

if he is hungry? Does baptism clothe your neighbor if he is naked? Does baptism relieve the suffering of those who are oppressed? Does baptism improve the moral fiber of the people who are baptized? I mean really. If you are going to view baptism as a good deed that you must do for God in order to be saved, then it isn't much of a work. Feeding poor people in a soup kitchen accomplishes far more moral good than baptism does. Running a homeless shelter does a lot more for people than attending the Sacrament of the Altar or getting confirmed.

If you are going to earn your everlasting salvation by doing good things then you had better be keeping the commandments of God. You had better be doing some things that are important. If you believe that you are good and because of that you believe that there are other good people besides God, then you had better be proving that you are good by keeping the commandments. And they cannot just be any old commandments. They need to be the commandments of God Himself.

Do not murder. That is one of the most important ones to keep. Even human reason can understand why it is important not to murder. No one wants to get murdered therefore murder is forbidden. Do not murder and keep the golden rule to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. And as the catechism explains it God forbids not merely the murder of your neighbor it forbids you from hurting him in his body as well. Do not do any physical harm to your neighbor whatsoever. If you want to inherit life keep the commandments.

If you have kept that one from your youth, how about this one: Do not commit adultery. And remember adultery includes those marriages that our Lord talked about last Sunday. Do not commit adultery. The family is the foundation of any society. Humans are created to live in families. Adultery dissolves the family. It is corrosive to the marriage bond. To commit adultery is to attack the fabric of society. To commit adultery is to harm everyone. Therefore avoiding adultery is a tremendous service and good deed to humanity. Remain faithful to your spouse and all will go well with you. And if you are going to avoid adultery you may as well avoid those things which lead to adultery. If you want to inherit everlasting life by doing something, then do this: avoid adultery.

If you have kept that commandment from your youth, then how about this one: Do not steal. Our Lord is so on about stealing this morning that He even lists it twice. Do not steal and do not defraud. It amounts to the same thing. Don't take anything that does not belong to you or that you have not earned. Pay your employees a fair wage. Do not cheat them. Do not cheat your neighbor by selling him something for more than it is worth. Pay your taxes so that society can be run in an efficient manner. Be generous while you are at it. Give to the one who would borrow from you. This helps your neighbor more than anything. There are thousands of poor people who would not be poor if someone had not taken advantage of them. This is a true good deed. It benefits society and demonstrates your generosity. If you are going to inherit eternal life because of something that you have done, do this.

If you have kept that commandment from your youth, then I suggest that you do not bear false witness either. Do not give false testimony in a court of law. Furthermore do not give false testimony in your daily life. Furthermore do not lie at all. Be honest in all of your conversations. Let your yes be yes and or no be no. Everything else comes from the evil one. Do not slander another person. If they tell you something in confidence, do not betray them by revealing it. Do not damage your neighbor's reputation. Your neighbor needs his reputation in order to function in society. Protect his reputation. By protecting his reputation you allow him to redeem himself if he should have sinned in the past. To constantly damage your neighbor's reputation by bringing up past sins does not allow him the opportunity to redeem himself. He thus cannot improve himself. By keeping his reputation you allow him to improve. You allow him to redeem himself.

If you have kept this commandment since your youth, then you also need to keep this one: Honor your father and your mother. Do what they tell you to do. Do not do what they forbid you from doing. Do what they tell you to do even when it does not make sense to you. Do not do what they forbid you from doing even when it does not make sense to you. They have experience that you lack and so God tells you to honor them. Do not resent them or their authority. Do not back talk them or show disrespect to them. Do not sigh when they ask you to do something. Do not delay doing what they ask you to do stalling to get your own way. Lay aside your own way and do it their way. They are your father and your mother. They are God's spokesmen in the household in order to teach you what you need to know in order to live.

Honoring your father and your mother is the bedrock of society. Our understanding of authority originates with father and mother. If we respect their authority, we will respect other authorities and society will function. We will respect our teachers, our coaches, the government, police officers, etc. If we do not respect our parents, we will not respect these other authorities either. Then all kinds of sin and unrighteousness will occur because we do not place limits upon ourselves. This is of true benefit to your neighbors that you honor your parents and that you honor other authorities as well. In the list of commandments this one ranks higher than even murder. Do this and you will live. If you want to inherit eternal life, honor your father and your mother. There is no greater human good that you can do.

Have you kept this one from your youth?

If you believe that you have not kept these since your youth, then you are a person who believes that only God is good. You also understand the real and one reason why you attend the Divine Service. But if you believe that you have kept all of these things since your youth, then out of love for you I must tell you that there is one thing more that you are going to need to do in order to inherit eternal life: sell everything as much as you have and give it to the poor and then devote yourself to a life of service to Christ.

Some of you have been concerned that I have told you to empty your retirement savings accounts in order to please God. If you are going to inherit eternal life by doing something, you must do far more than empty your retirement savings. You must sell everything. Every piece of equipment must go. Every electronic device must go. Every acre of land must go. Every home that you own must go. You must sell everything absolutely everything. Nothing must remain. Sell all of your furniture and all of your kitchen utensils. Once you have the money give it to a charity that serves the poor.

If you are going to do something in order to inherit eternal life this is the best and most good thing that you can do. By doing this you lay down the full sacrifice for another person's good and show yourself to be truly good. Only someone who is good sells everything and gives it away. Only someone who is good gives away everything that is dear to him for the sake of someone else.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.