

# Luke 18:18-27

Pentecost 23, Supplement Series C, October 23, 2016

Theme: God does the impossible

I. He quiets pride

II. He creates faith

INJ Impossible doesn't seem to be impossible anymore. If you follow sports, the statistics and records that once seemed impossible to match are regularly surpassed. In entertainment, the plot is often about an impossible situation that is resolved by the characters (or at least by spectacular special effects). In real life, impossible things happen, too, at least in American history. We put people on the moon. We do medical procedures remotely inside the heart while it is pumping. The technology in your cell phone does the impossible all day long.

We become accustomed to doing the impossible, and we don't doubt that it will happen. Will people travel to Mars? Can we cure cancer? Driverless cars? We will see more amazing things than that!

When God tells us it is impossible to make your own way to heaven, we take it as a challenge. How can I figure out another way, so that the impossible becomes possible? If I am smart, tenacious, tricky and lucky, maybe I can sneak in. Where can I make myself an advantage? How can I find the back door? Surely I can do it!

Such optimism and an entrepreneurial spirit – dare we call it pride? – is not unique to our nation. The sinful nature always wants to do things on its own. The man in our lesson is an example meant to teach us about the impossibility of getting ourselves to heaven. We cannot do it, no matter how hard we try. God does what is impossible for people by quieting our pride and by creating faith. He gives heaven to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This rich young ruler came up to Jesus with a question, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" I think the best way to gauge his question is to consider the context. Jesus responded in an uncharacteristically harsh way: "Why do you call me good?" I conclude that this was not a simple question seeking enlightenment and religious instruction, but an expression of pride: "Jesus, you are good. I am also good. Perhaps we could team up – and talk about the tricks of the trade. You help me and I can help you, partner!"

I don't think that what happened here is unusual. Wouldn't it be great to have Jesus as a partner? He could do the hard stuff and we would

take care of the rest. If Jesus cooperated with us, we would surely have a good family life, a decent income, solid plans. "What do I have to do to make the partnership happen, good Jesus? Think of the possibilities!"

Jesus will not be your partner. He is your God. That is why he answered: "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." Jesus insists that you humbly acknowledge his divinity. You cannot be proud in relation with God. You are the created, and he is the creator. You are powerless and he is almighty. You cannot have a partnership with Jesus. You need him to save you from your sins.

Pride tends to minimize sin, so Jesus lists several commandments for this man to consider. "Don't commit adultery. Don't murder. Don't steal. Don't give false testimony. Do honor your parents." If you keep these commands of God, then you will have the inheritance of God's kingdom. The natural arrogance of our sinful nature answers, "All these I have kept since I was young."

Our pride will not allow us to admit the guilt hidden in our hearts. "I am not like that poor soul who has obviously shattered the commandment!" "My life is respectable." The way just about everyone looks at the commandments is as a measure that reflects favorably on us. "I haven't done those bad things!" "I am good!"

Like the rich ruler in our lesson, you and I want the commandments to show off our righteousness. They don't. Instead, they expose our sin. Hatred is the same as murder. Lust is the same as adultery. Attitudes condemn as well as actions. In the face of God's commands our pride gets loud and defensive: "But, I am not that bad!" It is impossible to quiet our pride. It always wants to protest.

Jesus points out our arrogance: "You still lack one thing." (Here it is – the secret! I am all ears!) "Go, sell everything you have and give it away. Then come follow me." Jesus hits the first commandment, doesn't he? Do you love your investments more than Jesus? Your home or your car? Your job? Do you love your family more than Jesus? Would you give it all away? Can you say that you would be happy with nothing but Jesus? No electronics. No television. No sports. No education or communication. No security or solvency. Just Jesus. Is he good enough for you? Do you fear, love, and trust in God above all things?

This young ruler went away sad. In the contest between money and Jesus, money won. In his pride, he figured he could live without Jesus, but he could not live without riches. Our great wealth often stokes our pride. Who needs Jesus every moment when I can survive on my own for weeks? I have food in the freezer, money in the bank, supplies in the closet, friends

to give me aid, insurance for disasters. I am good enough.

But am I better than Jesus? He wants first place in our hearts, and the more possessions I have the harder it is to silence my pride and trust my Savior. No wonder Jesus said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God!"

Jesus' point is clear. Don't look for some mysterious way to squeeze a camel through a very small space. Jesus is saying that it is impossible for you to save yourself. None can keep the first commandment – or any commandment – perfectly. We cannot do it! Yet I can hear your pride resisting God's verdict already! (I'm good!) Pride is impossible to quiet.

Greed is a crippling curse that grows out of pride. I want more. I deserve more. I am sure money will solve my problems. Of course if I had more, I would be happier. But money is not God. Riches cannot save. My lust for more is another way I show that I cannot make it to heaven.

Even then pride doesn't give up: "I use my money in godly ways." "I do my best to praise God." "I go to church and I work hard and I stay clean. Isn't that good?" God silences our pride with his commandments. They are a mirror, showing our sin in all its horrible ugliness. Be quiet, pride! You are guilty! You are not good, but you are sinful, corrupt and rebellious. You deserve the curse of God what you have done and left undone. You cannot talk back at God, can you? You are not good.

Now you are exactly where God wants you to be. Helpless and hopeless and utterly defeated. Exhausted. God does the impossible by quieting your pride. No excuses remain. You cannot claim to be good.

God steps in to show you, to tell you that he has done what you could never do on your own. You cannot be good enough to save yourself. You cannot help ease the transition by being good. All your efforts at trying are not good. You cannot be a partner with God. But God has sent Jesus to be your Savior. He is the Good Teacher. He is God in the flesh. He is the perfect substitute who stands in your place. All the commandments - he was pure and perfect in keeping them. He did love God above all things. He honored his parents. He did not lust or hate or speak poorly of someone else. He never sinned, not even once.

And God gives you his perfection. He clothes you in Jesus' goodness. So that God sees you as having kept the commandments. Sees you as perfect in fearing, loving, and trusting God above all things. You are good in the sight of God because of Jesus, your Savior.

All the guilt, all the curse of God for the horrible crud that you have done, it was all laid on Jesus' shoulders. He carried the burden for the

world when he walked to the cross. Jesus suffered and died for all. He endured the forsaken-ness of the Father for you. He gave complete payment for your sin by shedding his blood on the tree.

The Father accepted the payment on your behalf. Jesus rose from the dead and announces peace. Your sins are forgiven. Jesus is not only good, but he is the only Way to enter eternal life. In Christ Jesus, you have the inheritance of the kingdom of God. God's gift is a treasure far greater than the paltry things we usually count as riches.

God's gift comes to each of us through a wonderful thing called "faith." The problem is that faith is an impossible thing for us to make, because it doesn't come from us, but from God. We cannot manufacture faith. We cannot decide to believe. Faith comes from "hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." If Jesus waited for proud sinners to come to him, none would come.

Jesus came to us. He uses those powerful words of his salvation to do what is impossible for us. He creates faith in hearts by the gospel! He came to you in the sacrament of Holy Baptism and gave you faith as a baby. He comes to you in the word you hear and keeps you in the faith. He comes in the sacrament of Holy Communion and strengthens your faith. God's miracle of faith is yours! God did what you could never do.

So now your energy and ambition and dedication is not the foolish and impossible task of making your own way to heaven. Your determination is to gladly hear and learn God's Word! Jesus calls us to follow him, to give up our grip on the worthless things of this world and cling to his saving message. Jesus has risen from the dead, and his words have given me new life! I want to, I need to, I have to follow him.

As you follow Jesus and rejoice in his words, all of your effort has a new focus. Not maneuvering for advantage with the good teacher, but praising the name of your Savior. Not wondering if you might have eternal life, but thanking God that you do have it. God has done the impossible and put faith in your heart. He is now the object of your praise.

Many things are possible in life. Ingenuity and persistence often pay off. Work hard at your education and your job and your interests – you may be involved in things you never would have dreamed!

When it comes to spiritual things, stop looking at yourself. None can earn the way to heaven, for God's commandments rightly cut off any glimmer of hope. God has quieted our pride. And, he has opened the Way to heaven through Jesus Christ. He gives faith and the inheritance – not because of our goodness, but through the gospel. "What is impossible with men is possible with God." Glory be to God! SDG Amen.