

# “With God All Things Are Possible”

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First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

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## Hebrews 4:12-16

*Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.*

*Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

## Mark 10:17-31

*As he 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; Honour 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 persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.’*

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations, and our faith to you and to the power of your spirit. I pray that you would take whatever is on our heart or in our minds. I pray that you would take the words we offer in song and in prayer. I pray that you would take the words we've heard read from Scripture. And I pray that you would take the words that you've laid upon my heart this morning to share. Touch, bless, and transform all of these words into the Word of Christ and let that Word, Christ's Word, do it's work within us, among us and through us. Let it be a word of peace and comfort. Let it be a word of challenge and invitation. Let it be a word of love and mercy and grace. Whatever we need, Lord, let your Word do its work here among us and through us out into the world. We ask this through the faithful name of Christ who is our Lord. Amen.

So I'd like to welcome you all to worship today at the First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood. It's stewardship season, so the message today is really simple. Sell all you have and give it to the poor [laughter]. Wipe out the savings account, the checking account, the retirement account, the 529 to send my grandkids to college account, the 403(b),

the 401k, the Roth IRA, the regular IRA, the spousal IRA, the rollover IRA. Wipe them all out. Sell all your stocks and bonds and CDs. Sell your mutual funds, your ETFs. Sell it all and give it to the poor. Everyone in favor say, "Aye." Yeah, exactly [laughter]. All right, Brad, you've got your work cut out for you when you come up to give the minute for stewardship. I'm just warning you [laughter].

We're not going to sell all that we have and give our money to the poor to amass treasure in Heaven, and then say, "Oh, look at me. I'm a faithful follower of Christ." And so we need to take a step back and look at this as an interaction between Jesus the teacher and someone who thinks that they've got it pretty well handled and watch what Jesus does to this person. This is someone who comes to Jesus who obviously has studied the law. He has kept the commandments since he was a young child. He's not breaking them. He's obviously a person of means by the way he's dressed, and he comes to Jesus, and he asks what many of us think is the fundamental question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" And in the story, and in the flow of his response, what Jesus does is change the trajectory of that question. I want you to imagine, instead of the cross up in front, that it's a big dial like on a stove, and the arm that's pointing over toward Mark, Luke, and John, the arm that's pointing that way, it says, "Me" on it. And when this person runs up at Jesus' feet and says, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?", the dial of his attention is focused on himself and his salvation. And we know that's not right. There's something inside of us that says, "Hey, Wait a minute. I shouldn't be overly concerned about myself. Oh, I know what. I need to be concerned about God." Because as it says here at the end of this encounter, for mortals, it is impossible, but not for God. For God, all things are possible. So I want you to imagine that the part of the cross that's pointing up from the center, up above that, it says, "God." Kind of where Jesus is in the windows there. And we think that instead of us being focused on ourselves, we need to turn the dial and instead be focused on God. Well, that makes sense, right? We're Christians. We need to be attentive to God's word, to God's spirit. We need to offer our songs, and our prayer, and our praise. But what we forget, or what we don't realize is that when these stories are written, the conclusion of the story is always in the middle. The Greek way of thinking is not our way of thinking.

And so Jesus is not trying to get someone who's self-consumed all the way to the point where they trust God alone. I mean, that's not a bad thing. He's actually trying to make the person's attention go even farther. And so if you could imagine the part of the cross coming this way towards the Old Testament side, out on the dial of that, you've got me, God, and over here you've got the poor. And the conclusion of the story is not, "Well, hey, young man who has everything, trust God", or hey, disciples who think, "Wow, this is too difficult to trust God." The answer to this parable-- what Jesus is trying to do is get the disciples, and us, and the young man to turn our attention away from ourselves, past God to the needs of the poor. And that's where the story concludes in scripture, in the middle, in the encounter where Jesus says, "Go sell everything and serve the poor." Because if we believe-- if what we believe that Christ's mission is true, we know that we're fine. God is God. We can't do anything about that. I mean, God's perfect, and there's no need to offer anything to God other than our thanks and praise. But when you spin the dial all the way around, you realize there's a lot we can do to help other people. And that is what Jesus is trying to get this young ruler who's rich, or us who are worshiping as Presbyterians today, to realize. It isn't about you. It isn't about me. Jesus saying, "Or my Father." It's really about how we care for those who are hungry, or homeless, or without clothing, who don't have the education they need, who are underemployed, who find themselves in broken situations. It's about how we, as the body of Christ, tend to those people. You may have heard this verse before, something along the lines of love your neighbors as you would love yourself. In a sense, this is the transition that Jesus is trying to get us to understand. Now, when we think about that and we often get kind of nervous because if we give food to the food pantry or we give clothes to Goodwill or to Salvation Army, if we volunteer for things, we often get nervous like, "Wait, is that my works coming out and somehow I'm trying to prove I'm better than everyone or I'm trying to prove I'm a good Christian or I'm trying to assure myself that I'm saved?" No, no, no. What Jesus is saying is that by loving other people and caring for those in need you are embodying the spirit that is mine, you are becoming me and you are my body in this world. So we still have the tension about selling everything and giving to the poor, but if we take a step back we realize that Jesus is talking to a particular person who was probably very rich and in order to teach that person what he wanted to have happen, he said the most outrageous thing he could, "Sell it all." And the person scoured away before they could actually hear the lesson if you will. So what do we do with this story, where it says that maybe we have to sell everything? What do we do when we ask the question, "What do I need to do to inherit eternal life?" Or what do we do when we have the question, "Well, if it's that hard to get a camel through an eye of a needle, then who?"

Anybody here last Sunday? You may have heard a sermon. Pat Tice, said yes because Pat Tice emailed me on Monday morning after she heard me last week talk about a chef in Italy named Massimo Bottura who has the best restaurant in the world, Cafe Franciscana, who I have a dinner reservation for December 14th, at 8:00 PM still. I haven't canceled it yet but I'm going to. And this guy has 12 tables in a little tiny restaurant and costs 500 bucks a meal and the food is unbelievable. So I preach on it on Sunday and then on Monday I get an email and it says, "Did you watch 60 Minutes? Because the third segment of 60 Minutes was about this Italian chef in Modena who's name is Massimo Bottura who's got the best restaurant in the world. And did you plan that?" And I'm like, "No, I preached before 60 Minutes. I don't have that much connection." But after watching the 60 Minutes segment and a few other things, I learned some amazing things about really what we could say is the world's best chef. So he spent his entire career building towards this pinnacle of culinary excellence. He's got three Michelin stars, a line of people waiting to come to Italy to eat his food and he's arrived, he's made it. And this guy kind of looks a little like mad scientist sort of. He's got hair sticking up and glasses and he wears a scarf.

But I want you to imagine if you will, if I can take you there, rather than asking, "What do I need to do to make my restaurant even better?" He's in there, let's say he's making lunch one day, he's in the kitchen with all the staff, they're cooking like crazy. And instead of asking himself, "What do I need to do to make this place better," he walks from the kitchen through the dining room out the door into the piazza in front of his restaurant and the question that he asked is, "What can I do to make the world a better place?" So instead of being focused on himself, he's focused on what can I do to make the world a better place and because he's a chef and he's really good, he decides to take soup kitchens and transform them into places where they can feed hundreds of homeless and hungry people. He's got three of them in Italy, they're all over now. But it's experience of great food in a place that's gorgeous and beautiful. And he talks about having three things that these soup kitchens need to have. He said, "They need to have a quality of ideas, they need to have the power of beauty, and they need to have the value of hospitality." That in trying to take food that's thrown out and transforming for great meals to people who don't have very much. He talks about these three characteristics that the soup kitchens need to have and that what they do is they transform the lives of our neighbors who are hungry because they can taste something that's a little bit different than what they've had. They experience something that feels-- it just feels kind of amazing. And they can sit in a community of people that love and care for them. And I realized as I spent time in prayer thinking about this approach to soup kitchens, it's what we try to do in worship every Sunday. We try to create an experience that is enriching to you. We try to create music and obviously, the beauty of this place speaks for itself and we value hospitality. There's so many new members who join our community who say, "Well, I love the music, the preaching is okay, but man, people were sure nice to me." So in a weird way, we've captured that sense that he's trying to capture. And I want us to think about those questions and the power of those questions for our own lives. Instead of asking yourself what do I need to do to have eternal life, go out the door of this church, take a moment and ask yourself, "What can I do to make the world a better place?" Amen.