

Year B 21 Sunday After Pentecost
Amos 5:6-7, 10-15
Psalm 90:12-17
Hebrews 4:12-16
Mark 10:17-31

Pastor Lindsey Jorgensen-Skakum
October 14, 2018
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

Grace and Peace to you all from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Amen.

“What must I do to receive eternal life?”

It’s a question I hear often in ministry – only its usually worded a little differently then in our gospel lesson this morning.

Sometimes it is a question raised by a grieving family – as they grapple with the loss of their loved one.

Sometimes its asked by parents as they worry if their children will be welcomed and embraced by God – even if they haven’t come to church in a long time.

And sometimes the question isn’t really a question at all – its more of a genuine prayer I come to hold with a person as they await the end of their life here on earth.

Like the young man in this mornings gospel we all come to ask these questions from time to time. We want assurance that we and those we love are on the “right path”, that we will be okay, and that we can truly place our trust in God.

Because there is simply so much of this world and this life in which we can’t place our trust.

Whether it is the onslaught of concerns we hear on the nightly news or simply those worries we regularly carry in our heart for our friends and family – we need to be reminded time and time again that we are all loved and beloved children of God – and that nothing – not even death can rob that from us.

However, as amazing as this message is - this is a gospel that stops to give us pause – since it also reminds us of our need for salvation – because even though our lives have been lovingly formed and held by God, one day, soon enough - we will die - returning to the earth once more.

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust. Beloved and held in the arm of God.

It’s a part of this text that gifts us with the opportunity to think about our mortality, our faith, and the gift of life we have each received.

Yet, it’s also the part of this text we tend to stray away from focusing on in our daily lives and our polite dinner conversations.

We battle against it in hospital rooms, we preventively hold it at bay when we exercise or eat our broccoli, and maybe we even anxiously approach our death as we wonder if we have lived up to the purpose we have been told our lives hold.

Never the less, death eventually comes to greet us. Whether it is through grief of loosing our beloved partner or spouse. The untimely death of a friend. Or even the passing of a cherished family pet. The idea of our own death eventually comes to rest upon us all.

This idea of our own mortality was something I regularly brushed up against when I was serving my rounds as a Hospital Chaplain in Saskatoon a few years ago. Many patients I walked alongside had found ways to cope with their ill health or terminal diagnosis.

Some angrily rallied against God in their fight against the clock, some chose to rely on the comforting words of the scriptures, while others chose to focus simply on what they could do each and every day they were given.

A young and vibrant woman I met on my rounds had recently found out that her long road with cancer was coming to a close. The doctors had discovered the cancer had spread throughout her body and she had been given just weeks to live. As I sat with her that afternoon – I couldn't help but notice that she had a calm and hopeful vision of what time she had left. And so I asked her what was giving her that sense of hope? And she responded,

“– it's that saying in the bible where God promises he wont ever give us more then he can handle.”

This was a phrase I had heard pop up time and time again in conversation with other patients – yet she had gotten it wrong – but yet so right – when compared with so many of her peers.

The phrase as I had heard said so many time before usually had placed God on the outside of the problem at hand as people shared *“God wont give me more then I can handle”* – like their current suffering was a badge of honor God placed on them to check out their spiritual chops – or perhaps even worse - that somehow they had to prove their worth to God through these circumstances to get their *“get out of jail free card”* from whatever they had come to face.

Yet, this young woman had heard this phrase in a very different light – choosing to place her trust and hope back on God's promise that there was nothing – absolutely nothing that would ever keep her from the hope she had found in Christ – that whether she lived or whether she died – she would be held in the loving arms of God.

And not unlike Jesus words to the man in our gospel lesson today – this woman’s words break through the illusion that we can somehow control God through our actions within the world. That if we just prayed more, gave up sugar, followed the 10 Commandments to a “T”, gave all our money away, or found time to take up that volunteer opportunity - we would some how prove ourselves to be right with God.

But this is not how God works - thanks be to God!

What this gospel is lifting up for us today is that our life and our death are not made perfect through our actions or even our “right belief” here and now.

Our life and our death are made perfect by God.

Who is able, capable, and truly trust worthy when it comes to holding all we have and all we love - in life, in death, and in life beyond death.

So perhaps, like this young man, this gospel is calling us to experience a new lens for this season of our life with God.

A lens that will help us live trusting that even in the midst of our most debilitating grief and loss that God is fully with us.

A lens that will help us live learning to lean into the promises of God we have heard time and time again – that there is enough grace and forgiveness for us all.

A lens that will help us live trusting fully that nothing and no one is ever outside of God’s love.

And maybe these are just some of the lens we are being called to live our lives through now.

Lenses that affirm we are all beloved and cherished children of God – not only here and now – but across every time and place – as we come to live, greet death, and be held in the arms of God with all the Saints who have gone before us.

A lens that will continue to help us see that nothing will ever come to separate us from the love of God.

And may this be so among us.

Amen.