

Sermon Notes – October 13, 2024
The Holy Gospel of St. Mark 10: 17-31
Peace Lutheran Church
“What Must We Do to Inherit Eternal Life?”

As often happens, Jesus is not asking the young man to do anything he would not do Himself. As we hear from perhaps the earliest Christian hymn (Phil. 2: 6-11), Jesus gave up equality with God, emptied Himself, and poured out what belonged to Him - purity, intimacy with God and the Holy Spirit - onto those who were poor and underserved. Following Him indeed means following His example. And that *kenosis* (self-emptying) is harder, of course, for those who are used to security and status than for those whose position is obviously insecure. It seems that the story about the “eye of the needle” (see Mark 10: 25) being a gate in a walled city, only large enough to accommodate an unladen camel, is not historical. Jesus seems to mean exactly what he says - it is not simply difficult for the rich to be saved, but for them it is impossible.

Today’s reading from Amos makes a similar, albeit not identical, point. The prophet calls on the rich and powerful to act justly. The most a person can ask otherwise is that the rich be fair, as it takes God to demand that they empty themselves. Amos also warns of the transiency of the benefit the wealthy enjoy. Because God protects, and indeed favors, the defenseless, the unjust can expect to lose to God's judgment the things they grasp so tightly, even before assuredly losing them at the grave.

Hebrews is intended to buck up the weary Christians - those tired of waiting for Christ to return so that their hopes can be fulfilled. In the meantime, they are suffering persecution from outside the church, and the harsh glare of the law on their motivations and actions from inside it. The author continues to use Jesus as an example of one who put up with everything these Christians are facing, and more. But he also brings in a second theme

of the book - Jesus as the fulfillment and goal of the sacrificial system emanating from the Jerusalem temple. Jesus is the ultimate high priest, the dependable and all-sufficient mediator between God and humanity. Because He is one of us, we are purified and not destroyed by the harsh glare of the law.