

**This Sunday's texts:**

Psalm 119:9–16

Hebrews 4:1-14

Mark 10:23-31

**Rest**

**Pastor Jim Cords**

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The holy Gospel according to St Mark, the tenth chapter:

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich man to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed that his words, but Jesus said 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." The disciples were even more amazed and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!" "Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age; homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields - along with persecutions - and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last and the last first."

The gospel of the Lord.

(Music Video by Pastor Jim's kids play)

Those are my kids. I felt so honored last year, exactly a year ago. This is the end of my first year as your pastor here at Saint Timothy's. I was so blessed that the kids could put that together, send it, and with their voices, be with us as we, as a family, began ministry together here with you. In many respects, it's been a challenging year. If you'll remember, that installation happened outside in the parking lot because we weren't allowed to come inside. Throughout the year, we've continued to face the various challenges that Covid has brought upon us. This pandemic has made life together as the people of God challenging. And yet, God is indeed faithful. And yet, our calling is still to lift up that one name of Jesus, to feel the hope and the promise that God gives us, and to be bearers of that hope to the world.

Sometimes I feel like I did when I was a little kid and I went to Disneyland to drive the cars on the Autobahn. How many of you people over 50 have done that? How many of you, like me, put your foot all the way to the floor and went urrr. Come on, you can go faster than that! They love to put governors on go-karts and other cars like that for people who don't know how to drive. It's to keep us safe. Sometimes I've even wondered if, over the course of this last year, God has put a governor on things, so that I didn't go racing ahead of him in ministry and in all sorts of initiatives that we might have engaged in. Even though I'm not going to say in any way,

shape, or form God sent the pandemic on the world to slow me down, God can and does use *all* things for his good. So the challenges we face in our lives are often challenges that God will use to bless us, to remind us that he needs to be the one in control and we need to constantly look to Him to lead us and guide us.

The funny thing is, in the midst of this pandemic, I have found it utterly exhausting. Anybody with me? It's like I've been doing almost nothing and it's totally exhausting. I think often life, in fact, is that way. We get tired when we work too hard and run too hard and push too hard, but we also get tired when we're bored. Both things help us to run out of gas. Today, we are reminded that as the people of God who have received the Gospel, who have received the promise of God's presence with us, he calls us; he invites us to enter into his rest. How's rest been going, Elizabeth, for the baby? Are you doing alright? Does the baby like naps? She does! You're blessed. I haven't asked my mom or dad this question, but I have a feeling I was one of those kids that never wanted to go down for a nap. Any of you have kids like that? I still don't like to go to bed at night. It's like I want to get more done. It's like no shut it down. Brain, shut down now. Oh, by the way, let me give you a piece of advice. When you go to bed, do not take your iPad and read your email. Not a good way to drop off to sleep. Also, don't check the news as you lay in bed just before you shut it down. That's not a good way to bring your heart and mind to rest.

We've had these tough texts the last couple of weeks. In the last 2 weeks, last week and this week, it's talked about riches. The rich young man was asked to sell all that he had and he walked away, sad. Today we hear in the text, in the gospel text, Jesus says it's harder for a rich man to enter having than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Now in case you haven't recognized this, you are rich. All of you in this room, all of us are rich. When you look at the global standard, just the clothes you're wearing when you walked in today are an indication that you are rich. The shoes on your feet. Some of you, the glasses or the contacts in your eyes. We are amazingly blessed. Now here is where my Lutheran theology helps out a bit. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It's not just the rich person for whom it's going to be hard to get into the kingdom of God. The fact of the matter is no one can do it on their own.

So the invitation to rest, the invitation to stop striving. I don't know about you, but when I hear something's going to be hard, you know what I think I need to do? Try harder. When something's hard, you give it more effort. Right? But if it's impossible, why waste your strength? And yet, the phrase in our gospel today that says it's impossible is not intended to say it won't happen. That's very unusual. Normally if you say it's impossible, what you're trying to communicate to another is that it won't happen. It can't happen. Chip, the [church] bathroom remodel has been pretty tough to get moving. It's impossible. If I said that I would say it isn't going to happen and you would stop wasting your time, if you believe me. But God isn't saying entering the kingdom of God is impossible. What he's saying is that it's only possible when I do it for you. It's only possible when you only receive it as a gift. The only way to enter into God's

rest is to receive it as a gift. The promise remains of entering his rest. Can you just take a deep breath with me? You see, as the people of God, we find rest in the assurance of his promise. We don't find rest in the assurance of our striving. We don't even find rest by being surrounded by a great team of people to do ministry at a new church in Silicon Valley. We find rest when we realize that God has gone before us, is coming behind us, and is walking with us, therefore we can trust and rely on those promises.

Someone asked me the other day in the office if I was a football fan. When someone asks me the question am I a football fan, I know my answer is no. Because when they ask the question, they're really asking like do you own 49ers paraphernalia? Are you a *fan*? When I don't even watch all the games, I know I don't qualify as a fan. But I did look up the Vikings-Lions game from last weekend and watched the highlights. Anybody see those highlights? Vikings were killing it, right up until the very end of the game. Then even though they had it - I mean. they *had* it - their running back decided that he needed to push for just a few more yards. They didn't need a few more yards, but he decided he was just not done. That's what football players do, right? That's what running backs do. They get the ball as far down the field as they can. They hold on tight and they keep pushing and pushing and sometimes it breaks loose. Sometimes they go for large gains. But, sometimes the defense strips the ball. Sometimes it's better to take a knee. I don't know if you saw the game, but the Lions stripped the ball. Instead of kicking it far down the field where the Lions would have to come 80 yards in less than a minute, they got the ball on the Vikings 20-yard line and they won the game in the last minute.

How about us? Do we keep striving in our faith? Do we keep pushing? And in the process, do we push others? Or do we enter into God's rest by understanding the depths of his promises for us and those around us?

I've been doing cycling a bit over the last few years in and I've been listening to what do you do to ride your bike 100 miles. A part of it is you have to work your way up to it. You probably shouldn't do it the first day out on the bike. So you do some training with the sort of mid-length rides, for 30 then 50, then 60, then 70 miles. You learn how to fuel your body in the process. And then you know what you do? You rest. What the professionals are discovering is resting is critically important for restoration. Joe, you don't pitch full-on every day, do you? You rest. You got to give your body time to recover.

As we're serving God, as we're bearing witness for Christ in the world, we also want to find times when we enter into his rest, when we're simply restored by the goodness of who he is and his promise. We realize that not everything depends on what we do. We can lean on the promises of God. Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Then there's another problem with my type-A personality brain. I think it's either sleeping in bed or running and nothing in between. All or nothing. Either you're on or off. There may be a dimmer switch, but I've never heard of that before. It's either off or on. You're either

going full-bore or you're sleeping, doing nothing. The truth of the matter is entering into God's rest, there's a walk involved. There is a loosening up on the off days involved. There's a trusting in God with not just letting go, but actually living into the fullness of what he invites us into as he rescues us from bondage and leads us toward the promised land. In our Hebrews text for today, it says this. "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart."<sup>1</sup> Do not demand to live life on your own terms and in your own way. Listen to the advice of the coach. Listen to God's word as he talks about how we are to live with one another and live into his guidance for us in his word. Listen to Hebrews 3. "Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning away from the living God. You must warn each other every day while it is still 'today,' so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God."<sup>2</sup>

One of the blessings of my cycling was that one of your friends' neighbors here in San Jose who owned a bike shop and had ridden for years and years and years, sold his shop here in San Jose and moved in next to me in Tucson. He coached me, but not only did he coach me, he rode alongside me. That meant when I bonked - bonking is like you totally have no energy left; you have to stop; you fall over; you're just done - he gave me food because I ran out, he gave me water because I ran out, he waited with me, and we limped back home very slowly. Once he even rode home, got the car, came back, and pick me up. But usually, he rode alongside me and he paced me.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we in the church need to remember one of the amazing gifts that God provides us is each other. We encourage one another in our walk of faith, to trust more fully in God, and to kind of rein us when we run off on our own. We also remember that God's word is a gift to us. In the Lutheran Church, Jonna and I were even talking about this last week, we talk in terms of Law and Gospel. When we hear the law of God, the rules, the instructions of God, often what it does is it just makes us feel guilty because we failed to do it. You know what happens when we fail to do it and it makes us feel guilty? We feel guilty. That isn't a good feeling. That isn't encouraging. Then we, in the Lutheran Church, bring the Gospel. We let our guilt drive us to Jesus, where we know forgiveness is found, where we know restoration is found.

But you know that's not the only thing the Law does. It reminds us not to steal from one another. It reminds us that a better way of life is when we live honoring our father and mother, instead of fighting against them when they want to put us down for a nap. It guides, directs, and reminds us that, look, this is the better way to live your life. Psalm 119, one of the longest psalms in all of scripture, has these great reminders in it. "How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 4:7

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 3: 12-13 (NLT)

you. Praise be to you, Lord; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts I consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.”<sup>3</sup>

Every once in a while, I get in a hurry and I almost never forget my coffee, but I sometimes forget my breakfast. I rush off to work. I'm going through the morning and about 10:30, I realize “Oh no! I forgot to eat!” And then, of course, the morning goes on, things are busy, sometimes I have an 11:30 meeting and lunch gets pushed late or sometimes I end up having to work through lunch and I don't get anything to eat. Do you know what that makes me? Hangry. Did anybody notice how quickly Jonna was the one to answer that question?

When we fail to nurture our hearts, our lives, our spirits with the word of God, we lack the resources of the voice of God that he would bring into our daily lives to guide us, to remind us of his promises, of his goodness, his blessing, and his calling and purpose for our lives. So often, we skip breakfast and lunch. I mean I know none of you would do this, but some of us even go for a whole week with the nurturing blessing of God's presence through his word to guide us and to bless us. It's not just a word to accuse us. It's a word to fuel our lives and allow us to hear the voice of God which invites us into his rest and invites us into his work in the world at his pace.

Why follow Jesus? For life and health and every good, for hope, for direction, especially in these such confusing days of pandemic and restrictions. Why follow Jesus? Because there's no one more worthy, no one who knows you better, no one who loves you more, no one who sacrifices more for you, no one else who holds our future. In our gospel lesson today, as you pull this section out that we read today, you can forget that it follows in chapter 10, the story of the rich young ruler, where Jesus said go sell all that you have and give it to the poor and then come and follow me. Then Jesus says in our text today, it is harder for the rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven than for the camel to go through the eye of a needle. It's easy for us to conclude that this is about riches. Well, it is about riches if riches are preventing you from following, but Peter catches the phrase. Peter follows the logic. He says, Lord, we have left everything to follow you. Jesus says you will not fail to receive blessings and eternity. How many of you caught the other word in the reading? - and persecutions. Brothers and sisters in Christ, this rest that we're invited into, this rest that Jesus provides for us does all that is necessary to invite us into that rest. It doesn't mean there will be no struggle. It doesn't mean there will be no hardship. It doesn't mean there will be no persecutions. What it means is the faithfulness and the promise of God will stand beyond those persecutions. The faithfulness and promise of God will not only lead us into them, but through them and beyond them into eternity. God will be the victor. I believe, Lord. help my unbelief. All year long, I believe, Lord; help my unbelief. Well, we can't do that. Warren, how do you read this? No, can't do that. I

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 119:9-16

believe, Lord; help my unbelief. What are the challenges that face us? What are the hardships that face us, as we're averaging in our attendance about two-thirds of what we would have expected because people are still nervous. People are still being safe and that's probably a good thing. But Lord, I believe; help my unbelief. We're going to walk forward, knowing that God has gone behind us, knowing that God goes ahead of us, knowing that God is with us this very day. So we're going to breathe. We're going to celebrate. We're going to give God the glory. We're going to lift up that one name above all names who is to be praised and we're going to trust in his power and in his strength to give us rest, to give us renewal, and to call us into the future he holds for us. Thanks be to God! Amen.