

The Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost – 2024
Ecclesiastes 5:10-20
Hebrews 4:1-16
Mark 10:23-31

Kevin Arnold was prepared to pay for dinner. It was Jack's birthday, Kevin's dad, and the 15-year-old young lad was going to spring for a festive night. Things had not been going well in the Arnold family. Conflict was rife and an evening celebration seemed just the ticket to restore good will. Jack got to choose the restaurant and the reservation had been made. The whole family arrives in attire that fits the occasion. Norma, Kevin's mom, approaches the maitre d'. Maitre d' is French – it's an abbreviation for "master of the house." This maitre d' is a snooty man (aren't they all?), looking out for himself, looking to use his position to cash in. The swindling headwaiter announces that there is no "Arnold" reservation and Norma is beside herself. *Of course* she made the reservation. Jack, ten feet away, asks if there is a problem and Norma, clearly rattled, says "no, no problem."

In steps Kevin. He's the main character in this play, a television series called *The Wonder Years*. Kevin knows what to do. Mustering all the savvy that a 15-year-old can summon, he pulls out his wallet and suggests to the maitre d' a solution. "I'm sure that we can work this out," says the sincere but inexperienced Kevin as he waves a \$1 bill in the face of the restaurant grifter. Clearly underwhelmed, the maitre d' shows them into the dining hall. Kevin made his play, got the result, and is enjoying the moment. The Arnolds spy an elegant table, and with smiles, anticipate being seated. "No. I'm sorry" says the smug master of the house, "your table is over here." He seats them at a dimly lit, poorly set, rudely constructed table right by the swinging doors to the kitchen where bus boys hustle in and out continually. The dinner turns out to be a disaster.

An aloof maitre d'; a pocket-lining, palm greasing, power-tripping sleazebag in a tuxedo; one who looks favorably on those who slip him a Jackson, or a Grant, or even better, a Franklin, but who has no regard for those less well-heeled. Strangely, that is how the disciples viewed God. Jesus gave voice to the inherent danger that wealth brings. "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:23). Competing allegiances for one's heart can come in many forms but wealth is especially dangerous, especially tyrannical. The disciples were amazed at such talk. Clearly sensing that the disciples' misconceptions were teetering, Jesus proceeds to push them over completely.

"Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eyes of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:24). The disciples were familiar with hyperbole but they had never heard anything like this. Wealth put you at the front of the line, or so it was thought. Wealth was a sign of God's favor, a sign of His approval. Besides, a rich person could offer more alms; a rich person could offer more sacrifices due to his wealth and now Jesus was saying that rich people can scarcely be saved... what does that mean for everyone else? What does that mean for those who cannot do all the things that God approves of because their resources are so meager? "And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to Him, 'Then who can be saved?'" (Mark 10:26).

A perfect question; that is a perfect question! Who, then, can be saved? I can't bribe the master of the house; I can't tithe enough, pray enough, genuflect enough. The most advantageous among us stand as much of a chance of getting into the kingdom as does a camel going through the eye of a needle. There is no hope. **And that is where Jesus wants His disciples – with no hope in men or the works of men.** “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27).

What is possible with God? It is possible for God to become man. It is the incarnate Master of the house who says: “Let me show you to your table.” It is possible for all of humanity's sin to be placed on the God/man who stands in your stead. Let me show you to your table. It is possible for the blood of this divine Savior to pay the enormous debt for you and every other sinner in this world. Let me show you to your table. It is possible to destroy death from the inside. Here we are, your table – heaven on earth. Nothing is impossible with God. Your salvation is found in Him alone and He sets His table with grace, with unqualified acceptance, with astounding riches – with His crucified and risen body and with His holy and precious blood.

The reality is this: We are all indigent, penniless, paupers to the bone. We have nothing – no righteousness of our own, no self-constructed holiness, no spiritual Jackson, or Grant, or Franklin to offer the Almighty to make His eyes widen. You are a ward, not of the state, but of the church. Broke, bankrupt, destitute; you are a sinner, like me. Ah, but this is a trustworthy saying: “Christ came to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). He was rich, amazingly rich; and for you He became poor. Poor in His manger, poor on His cross, poor with your sin, poor beneath His Father's wrath, poor in your death, poor in His tomb. He died wretchedly poor. Judged; humanity was judged guilty as Christ bled and died in our spiritual poverty. And in a blessed exchange, you are made wealthy. The vast treasury of Christ's purity – it is yours by faith. You have been judged righteous. Jesus' righteousness has been credited to your account. By His poverty you have been made rich. With the only thing that truly matters, you are rich. We are rich with His love. Nothing is impossible with God. God took up our flesh. God lived in our broken world. God died on the cross to save us. God rose again. God feeds us with His wealth. Let me show you to your table. There is it! Christ's altar where you feed on His righteousness – His body given and His blood shed. Nothing is impossible with God. Who then can be saved? It is a perfect question. It is you, it is you, it is you, it is you; you and every other poor beggar; you are saved.

To care for the poor; Christians are called to do this. Looking after the less fortunate pleases God. God Himself aids the poor through us, through you. Stop and think why. Stop and think: Why does God will for us to help those who languish in poverty? Yes, because all men need the staples of life and sometimes the means to obtain the basics just isn't there. We are to help our neighbor. It's quite simple. But there's more. When you, as a believer, when we, as a congregation, extend ourselves to those in need it reflects what He did for us – the real and enduring extension He made toward us – in saving us poor sinners, in sharing His assets, His holiness. Aiding the poor reflects the Gospel of Jesus. We do as He has done, and in this too we are made rich.

These are the Wonder Years of Christ the King Lutheran Church – with family, brothers, sisters all, in our Father's house. Our Elder Brother has made the reservation and He has set the table.

He is the maitre d', the Master of this house, and He is the banquet. God Himself has brought the rabble from the neighborhood, you and me, and invited us to dine at His banquet table, His altar. It is not a birthday we celebrate but a resurrection. Salvation unto us has come, for nothing is impossible with God.