

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 23) – October 13, 2024

*“And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him,
‘You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give it to the poor,
and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’”*

–Mark 10:21–

On one of the many retreats that I’ve been blessed to lead, I had the group do the trust fall. For those who don’t know what this is, the group lines up in two rows facing each other holding the hands of the person across from them. One person climbs up on an elevated platform such as a picnic table or a tree stump. Facing away from the group, the person with arms crossed falls backward into the waiting arms of the group who catches him. Well, there was one occasion where that didn’t happen. I was dropped.

While I was not hurt, I certainly was a bit shocked. Shocked is certainly the correct word when we read the reaction to the rich young man who asks how he might gain eternal life. Now Jesus doesn’t challenge the rich man’s statement that he has kept the commandments. We could certainly question that, as it is impossible for us to totally keep the commandments. Jesus does ask him about where this rich man places his trust.

In telling the man to sell all that he has and give it to the poor, Jesus is telling him to divest of all that has meaning in this earthly life. The rich man had become a servant of his own wealth. “You cannot serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matthew 6:24).

Being a disciple of Jesus is to trust first and foremost in God’s only Son. To place our eternal well-being in our finances, our families, our government, our achievements, our merit, or anything else that we call our own is to place our trust in idols, in whom we will only find ourselves dropped. Jesus reminds us directly that our salvation is in him alone. “For with God all things are possible.” (Mark 10:27b).

That which God has given us is his from the very beginning. As followers of Jesus, let us use what God has given us not as a means of comforting ourselves, but serving the needs of our neighbor. In so doing, we follow the one who came among us not to be served but to serve: Jesus, the Christ.