

Who then can be saved? Mark 10:17-31 – Revd. Dallas Ayling

There is a lot to think about in this reading sparked off by this rich man asking Jesus what is required of him to enter eternal life. The man knew that this had to be about his own personal life. And there was obviously something about Jesus which had been making him think. Perhaps they already knew one another, perhaps he had been following Jesus around. So, he comes to a point when he dares to ask the question, of course with the hope that he would receive a favourable answer. He falls to his knees. Out of respect or perhaps like a prayer. Perhaps, he has an expression of expectation, and just maybe he is excited and eager to please. He has heard Jesus speak and he wants to know something more about what Jesus is offering. He thinks that he has made it even assuring Jesus that he has kept all the commandments since he was a boy. He must have been so pleased with himself that he could say that – surely that is enough – but perhaps he holds his breath as he waits for Jesus' reply.

Have you ever been in that place that all the signs are pointing in the right direction about something, and you are hopeful about the response and when it comes it isn't quite what you were expecting?

Jesus – looked at him and loved him. That is his first response – and hopefully the man saw that on the face of Jesus. He loved him.

But that love came with some challenging words because Jesus could see the one thing that the man had not admitted to. Maybe it didn't seem to him to be relevant, but to Jesus it was. It was the very thing that Jesus needed to address, and Jesus says: "One thing you lack." Just one thing. That sounds promising, doesn't it? One thing will make a difference to this man understanding what it is to receive eternal life. Perhaps he felt a moment of excitement. This was it. He was going to get the answer he thought he knew. "Go and sell everything you have and give to the poor – and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." This one thing that he lacked could be overcome. The man's face changed, and his face fell which means that he could not look Jesus in the face as he had done. He was rich and his wealth meant a lot to him and perhaps he had thought that if he only worked a little harder, he could inherit eternal life. It's a bit of a blow for this man, isn't it? Consider what Jesus is telling him about eternal life. He is saying that it is such a huge gift that he must have empty hands in order to receive it. To trust like a child. And this man's hands weren't empty because they were full of material wealth and probably the cares and distractions that go with it. All we know is that he went away sad. We don't know what the man did, whether or not he was able to take up the offer from Jesus. Jesus loved the man but made no attempt to dissuade him from walking away. The condition has

been set. The man must make up his own mind for commitment cannot be forced. It is often thought that he didn't respond in a positive way, but Jesus uses this as a way of teaching his disciples that entering the Kingdom of God is not easy. In doing so the disciples began to panic a bit about their own position and situation. "Who then can be saved?"

We know that people put it off. They hear the words of Jesus. Perhaps even a good sermon, an assembly at school, an Alpha Course, the Gospel is explained clearly to them, and they have some kind of spiritual inclination, but they put it off, or delay it, and maybe we have done that in our lives too or are continuing to do so. "I'll do something later, next week, next month, never. The hands are full of other things whether it is to receive the offer of salvation or even that God is calling us to do something specific for him and we find a reason not to do it. It is difficult, isn't it? Just like this man found it difficult.

It seems that so often brokenness, hopelessness and other life events is the time, the moment when God is able to step in because there is nothing in the hands of people at those moments but that is not always the case of course. Rich people do become Christians, but Jesus says that it is somewhat harder to receive what he is wanting to give when other things are in the way. Everything is

possible with God though, because he looks at us in the way that Jesus looked at that man – with love. But that love came at a cost. Peter's response is that they had already given up everything to follow Jesus. It sounds a bit boastful, doesn't it? Or was it a bit of desperation? On the one hand Jesus reassures Peter that if you have given up whatever Jesus has called you from, for the gospel, much will be given but, Jesus makes no attempt to disguise any of the cost. He says that much will be given in return but even in that optimistic part of the statement have you noticed that Jesus slips in – along with persecutions. Now I've never noticed that before. I expect there are many people in other places in the world who just know exactly what that means with cost to their relationships with their family, loss of employment, marginalisation, and threat to life. We might not ever know that kind of level of persecution but the challenges for us might not be easy to deal with. I am fairly certain that my faith and calling was a contributory factor to the broken relationship I had with my sister who was an ardent atheist. It is one of the sadness's in my life because she never wanted reconciliation and died a number of years ago.

The man had counted the cost to himself, but have you thought about how salvation and the promise of eternal life is such a huge gift to us? And obtained and given at such a cost to God?