

“Bring them into light!” Mark 10:17-31

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

What do you think, which sins are the most dangerous for our faith, and for our eternal life? I would suggest that those that we are not conscious about. Those that can quietly exercise their influence over us and yet remain unnoticed.

If we as Christians are aware of what tempts us and what our weaknesses are then with prayer, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can bring them into light. And what is brought into light, becomes light.

We can confess them, either in the service here in God’s house, or what is even more efficient – in private confession with your pastor. And once they are confessed, once you hear the words –

“By the command and on behalf of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins” – they are forgiven, and they lose great share of their power over us. Confession and Absolution – these are wonderful gifts that our Lord has given to us, to help us walk on the narrow path as we try to follow Him.

But what if we are not even aware of our sins? Then they hinder our freedom to live as God’s children, they make us blind to certain things, they make us

foolish, and what is worst, they tirelessly work to undermine our faith, our relationships with Jesus. They are like a tumour that is not yet diagnosed.

Most often these are sins in our relationships with God, sins against the first three commandments. It is less likely that we would disobey authorities, harm our neighbour, steal and lie, or commit adultery, and then be surprised ... ups, I didn't even notice that.

In today's reading we have this great material to reflect on these hidden sins, – Jesus conversation with the young rich man. It can help us to reflect on these matters more than in one way.

We read that as Jesus was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “You know the commandments”.

And the young man said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Here it is, an example of the hidden and powerful idols that hold us back from following Jesus. This young and rich man; by all accounts he was just a great guy. He was a ruler in his synagogue, or we could say, one of the elders in his congregation.

He was leading moral and chaste live. Today you won't see too many young people who are very rich and at the same time very devoted to God, deeply involved with congregation, and zealous to enter the Kingdom of God. How many do you know?

This young rich man was one of such people. Even if he was rich and held the influential position in his synagogue, look at his attitude towards Jesus! He humbles himself, he kneels before Jesus, and asks for guidelines for his life.

Let's see how it went. He obviously had done the outwardly stuff since childhood. He had strived to keep the Commandments. And perhaps, as far as human eye can see, he had succeeded.

But even then, he knew in his heart that something was missing. And Jesus graciously pointed to the missing piece. “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

And his face fell. Jesus words had struck something unexpected. Jesus words had suddenly revealed the young man's hidden sin, or we could say idolatry. Even if he was almost perfect in his outwardly behaviour, and we can sometimes succeed in this, his heart wasn't with Jesus, it belonged somewhere

else. “Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” How would you react if Jesus told you: “You lack one thing, go and sell everything you have, give to the poor and follow me!” ... If these words make your face fell then this could be one of your hidden idols, that holds you from following Jesus with your whole heart.

We also need to be clear that what Jesus said to the young man is not some kind of universal requirement for Christians. Sure, money and possessions are one of the most powerful idols, and I don’t think that anyone of us is totally free from it, but it may not be our main problem.

But that was the problem to the young man. Here we can see so clearly what the Triune God expects from us. It is not only about keeping the commandments that guide our relationships with people. To certain extent, at least outwardly we can do that. Unbelievers can do it as well.

It is first and foremost about our relationships with our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Loving Him more than anything. Trusting Him more than anything. Fearing to anger or to lose Him more than anything.

It is about the 1st Commandment. Fearing, loving and trusting God above all things. And this is much harder than to behave well and be nice to others. We can’t keep the 1st Commandment on our own.

This is where we all need the help of the Holy Spirit. The Good News are that our Father in heaven gives His Spirit without measure to everyone who desires to receive it. This is why He graciously serves us every time He gathers us here.

Remember, as we hear our God speaking to us, as we listen to Him either in the Scriptures, or sermons, or Bible studies, or our home devotions, – He sends His Spirit into our hearts. He speaks, and we are renewed.

He converses with us, and we are strengthened in faith, built up in His divine wisdom, and filled with joy and peace. Our God is gracious and loving God, He is abundant in His gifts.

He has called you here to bless you, and to fill your life with good things. Thanks to Him we are not on our own, our God is always right next to us, caring, protecting, guiding, embracing and gently whispering His love. And with His help we can make our little steps even keeping the 1st Commandment.

But ... there is something else, one more example of hidden sin or idolatry that we can reflect on in this account, and which hits really close to home. Let’s take a closer look at how Jesus communicated with the young man and see what we can learn from Him.

So, the young man came to Jesus. He had His own ideas about what is needed to inherit eternal life. As many people do. They think they know better. He thought He will do something else, some external thing, and that should be enough.

What did Jesus do? He responded with something so unexpected to the young man that his face fell and “disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful.” How would you evaluate what Jesus did?

The man came to Jesus, but Jesus said something that put this man off. What would Australians say? How did you dare Jesus? How could you be so insensitive? You could have befriended the young man and then sometimes later, who knows... but at least you would have good relationships.

This is how we are used to relate to others. To please people, to appear good in their eyes, to be accepted by them, – these things seem to be much more important than speaking the truth and caring for someone’s salvation.

This is the problem I wanted to bring to your attention. And this is the 1st Commandment problem. And it seems to be hidden from us. We fear what people may think, and we don’t really fear what the holy God may think.

We care about making people happy by giving them what they demand, for then they will love us and appreciate us. We don’t care so much about freeing people from their sins and idolatry and leading them to eternal life in Jesus.

And we often do this convinced that this is what we are supposed to do as Christians. And so, we are afraid to speak the truth. More, we use this ‘only don’t judge’ rule to prevent anyone from speaking the truth.

However, no one can be saved because we are nice to them. They can only be saved by hearing the truth of the Gospel. That we all are sinners and idolaters, and unless we repent and return to the Lord... we have no future with Jesus.

Let’s go back to Jesus and the young man. Why did Jesus say these harsh things? Why should Christians say the truth even if it makes someone unhappy? We can read it right there, why Jesus did it – because Jesus, yes, loved him!

We need to get this right if we want to bear the name of Jesus. We need to learn from Jesus and not from the world. Jesus loved the young man, and therefore He didn’t ignore his idolatry, but spoke directly about it.

And the young man left sorrowful. We don’t know what happened with him later. Did he get over his idols of riches and turned to Jesus? May be, may be not? So, what can we learn from our loving Saviour and Master?

If you love someone, if you genuinely desire good for them, you don’t try to please them and leave them in their sins or errors. Christians don’t do that. Instead, we speak the truth in love. We shouldn’t care about us being accepted by people, we should care about all people being accepted by God.

This is one of our hidden sins in the LCA, and it is the more dangerous if we are not aware of it. But now we are, thanks to God. The Word of God has shed the light on this issue, and by God’s grace now we are aware of it.

Now we can confess our wrong thoughts and hear God's cheerful voice proclaiming: "My dear child, I forgive you all your sins!" We can take great comfort knowing that we are in the hands of our Father, and that Jesus and the Holy Spirit care and fight for us, and for our salvation without ceasing.

When we are blinded and fooled by our hidden sins, we wander in darkness. But thanks be to God, who has called us by the Gospel and has enlightened us with His gifts and has made us His people. You are under His care, you are under God's protection. You are beloved children of your loving Father in heaven.

The world will continue to lie and deceive, to tempt and to threaten, but we can have peace and security, for our Lord Jesus has overcome the world. To Him all authority has been given, He holds us in His hands, and as long as we don't turn our backs to Him, no one and nothing will separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus. Brothers and sisters! Rejoice in the Lord! Rejoice always!

Amen.