**10/14/18**

**Gospel Reading Mark 4:12-16**

In April 1997, residents of Grand Forks, North Dakota lost almost all their possessions to the rising river. Record snowfalls had melted into record spring floods. Weeks later, the flood finally receded, but Grand Forks was still waterlogged. The air was filled with a peculiar, unpleasant river smell. Homeless and disheartened, people began the daunting task of cleaning up the mess. The flood may have ruined their homes, but it didn’t ruin their sense of humor. Homeowners propped up signs in their front yards with comical handwritten messages on them:

“Basement apartment, $10 a month, indoor pool…”

“Revenge of the night crawlers.”

One sign wasn’t humorous but had a very thought-provoking message:

It read: “We are not what we own.”

The editor of the local Herald agreed.

He wrote, “If we were what we owned, we’d be far less than we were before the flood.”

The truth is: We are worth far more than our possessions. Our personal wealth does not indicate our personal worth. Whether we’re rich or poor doesn’t really matter. What really matters is our faith, our relationship with God, family, and friends.

The people of Grand Forks found themselves stuck in the middle of tragedy, overwhelmed by disappointment, discouragement, and loss. They began to become unstuck when their sense of humor took over, and they could work and laugh with their neighbors.

A young man bought his dream truck. It had all the bells and whistles. It was his favorite color. It had everything he had always dreamed of having. And it could go off-road – he could go anywhere in that truck. He took it into rough country and spent the day driving through streams, over rocky roads, and through the mud. He was having the time of his life, -- until he drove through mud a lot deeper that he thought it would be. He felt the tires start to slip and spin. He stepped on the gas and the tired slipped some more, and then he wasn’t moving. He put it in reverse, hoping he could get out that way. It didn’t work. Then, he tried rocking it back and forth by going from reverse to drive, and back. It moved a little – but only deeper. His truck, his fantastically wonderful vehicle was stuck. It isn’t any fun being stuck. You just end up feeling frustrated and helpless.

Fortunately, his cell phone worked out there and he was able to call a friend for help. His friend’s truck was not as new and fancy as his. But it got him out of the mud.

You know how these people felt. You’ve been there yourself. You know how it feels to be stuck.

The doctor tells you what you had been hoping and praying he wouldn’t say. Tragedy strikes and you lose your treasured, hard-earned possessions. Prices go up, but your income doesn’t, and you are stuck. Hurricanes, tornadoes, or earthquakes strike, and you lose much of what you owned. Or maybe you’ve been stuck in a spiritual rut, where you are just doing the same things over and over, and you can’t find the joy and peace God wants to give you. Whatever it is, you are stuck. And when we become stuck, we need some help getting unstuck.

In this morning’s reading we discover a man who was really stuck. He knew he was stuck. And he knew he didn’t know how to get unstuck. He was so anxious to get out of his difficulty he ran up to Jesus and knelt before him. He wanted to inherit eternal life. He knew all the commandments and kept them. But somehow he knew he wasn’t quite on target.

“Teacher, I have kept all the commandments since my youth.”

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

The answer Jesus gave disturbed the man, and often causes us some concern. Jesus looked at him, loved him, and said:

“You lack one thing. Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. And you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

And we cringe. Can we really sell everything we own? How could we live? We can try the excuse that we are not wealthy, so maybe we are okay. We can ignore this story and hope for the best. But we ask: Is it what God really wants us to do? Doesn’t it sound a bit like buying eternal life?

Throughout the Bible we are taught to believe in Jesus Christ and we will be saved. Selling all one’s possessions, and giving the money to the poor is not a condition for receiving eternal life.

The Bible was written so people can come to believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And in believing we can have life through His Name.

When others asked “What must I do to be saved?”

The answer was not, “Sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall be saved.”

This man’s story, told in the other Gospels also, is the only time someone was told to sell everything he had, and give the money to the poor.

This man failed to realize he had not really obeyed all the Commandments. He missed the part about: “You shall have no other gods before Me.” And: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and mind, and soul.” God was not first in this man’s life. His possessions had the number one place. At the words of Jesus, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

He also missed the final part of Jesus’ answer: “Then come, follow me.” The only way this man could follow Jesus would be to let go of his many possessions. And he was very reluctant to do so.

Traditionally, everyone assumes this young man never obeyed the words of Jesus. Yet, we do not really know. After some time of pondering, he may have changed. He might have placed God first in his life and passed on the good News of Jesus Christ to many others. We simply do not know.

But our main concern for the moment is how we follow Jesus. Do we go away shocked and grieving because we are unable to put God first in our lives? Do we have other gods before our Heavenly Father? Do we love the Lord our God with all our heart, and mind, and soul? God was not first in this man’s life. His possessions had the number one place. Do we do the same?

We so often get stuck, stuck in catastrophes, problems, despair, out to do lists, by placing other things before God.

But Jesus doesn’t leave us stuck. He offers a way out. The way out is not about doing something, but believing in him. He loves us as much as he loved this man who came to him. He invites us to put God first, and to Come, follow him.

What is your choice?

It will make all the difference in your life.

AMEN