



Carstairs-Bancroft United Church
February 9, 2022
DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC
By Rev. Maria Szabone Berces



Photo: Our Daily Bread

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

Today's Inspiration in one sentence
"... with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26)

Did You Know?

Let's recall what we have learned before about the **Gospel of Matthew**:

- "The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the **synoptic Gospels** because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar or sometimes identical wording." (Wikipedia)
- The date of this Gospel is argued among scholars. Some dates it between the 50s and 70s AD. Some says its date is 80-90 AD, because the author makes a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. (The Chalice Introduction to the New Testament; pg. 152; The NIV Study Bible)
- The theologians agree that the writer is *not* one of the Apostles. There is one thing that is not argued, and it is his Jewish heritage. This is indicated by his familiarity with the Torah, the Jewish Law, as well as Jewish practices. (Knowing Christianity by A.R.C. Leaney; pg. 38; The Chalice Introduction to the New Testament; pg. 153)
- Matthew's main purpose is to confirm for his Jewish-Christian readers that Jesus is their Messiah. He does this primarily by showing how Jesus in his life and ministry fulfilled the OT Scriptures.
- The term of "*eternal life*" in today's reading occurs much more frequently in the Gospel of John than in the synoptic Gospels. They rather use the "kingdom of God (or heaven)" expression. These three gospels treat eternal life, entering the kingdom of heaven, and being saved as synonyms.
- The *good* is not something to be done as meritorious in itself. God alone is good, and all other goodness derives from him - even the keeping of the commandments. The requirement to "keep the commandments" is not to establish one's merit before God but is to be an expression of true faith. The Bible always teaches that salvation is a gift of God's grace received through faith. (The NIV Study Bible)

Personal Insight

I appreciated the distinction that the writer of the devotion below spotlighted between being perfect through our faith and "*perfectionism*". During my counselling studies, I also read that "*perfectionism*" is not a positive term. It slows us down, narrows our thinking, and makes accomplishing our goals more difficult than it should be.

Whether we suffer from "*perfectionism*", or think it is not possible for us to reach being "perfect" as Jesus calls us to be in the Gospel of Matthew, I found it encouraging that the burden of accomplishing this holiness is not merely on us. We need our will and longing, for sure. But let's not forget that **"... with God all things are possible."** (Matthew 19:26)

Grace and peace to you all,
Rev. Maria



Perfect Like Christ

Be perfect . . . as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 5:48

READ Matthew 19:16–26

“Perfectionism is one of the scariest words I know,” Kathleen Norris writes, thoughtfully contrasting modern-day perfectionism with the “perfection” described in the book of Matthew. Modern-day perfectionism she describes as “a serious psychological affliction that makes people too timid to take necessary risks.” But the word translated “perfect” in Matthew actually means mature, complete, or whole. Norris concludes, “To be perfect . . . is to make room for growth [and become] mature enough to give ourselves to others.”

Understanding perfection this way helps make sense of the profound story told in Matthew 19, where a man asked Jesus what good he could do to “get eternal life” (v. 16). Jesus responded, “Keep the commandments” (v. 17). The man thought he’d obeyed all of them, yet he knew something was missing. “What do I still lack?” (v. 20) he asked.

That’s when Jesus identified the man’s wealth as the vise-grip stifling his heart. He said that if he wanted “to be perfect”—whole, willing to give and receive from others in God’s kingdom—then he must be willing to let go of what was closing off his heart from others (v. 21).

Each of us has our own version of perfection—possessions or habits we cling to as a futile attempt to be in control. Today, hear Jesus’ gentle invitation to surrender—and find freedom in the wholeness that’s only possible in Him (v. 26). – By **Monica La Rose**

REFLECT & PRAY

Loving God, forgive me for so often mistaking my own self-improvement ambitions for growing in You! Help me to surrender control and embrace a life of freedom with You. Amen.

When have you mistaken personal goals for biblical “perfection”? How can surrendering control to God offer freedom from perfectionism?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

Luke 18:18 identifies the rich young man in Matthew 19:16–30 as a “ruler,” which can mean a synagogue leader, a Jewish elder, a leader of the Pharisees, or a member of the Sanhedrin. He asked Jesus what he needed to do to enter the Messianic kingdom (v. 16). On another occasion, “an expert in the law” asked Jesus the same question to test Him (Luke 10:25). In Matthew 19:24, Jesus used the ludicrous illustration of the camel going through the eye of a needle to highlight the impossibility of anyone being able to “do something” to save themselves, for it’s God alone who saves (v. 26). - By **K. T. Sim**

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