



# Sunday Reflection

## Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 10 October 2021

# Pentecost 20

Eternal life is available to all of us, but achieving it involves cost. Today we rejoice that Jesus came to bring life to all, and to consider how we can receive his gift.

## Reflection for this week's Gospel

**"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"**

*Mark 10:17*

### **An Illustration to set the scene**

James was approaching important exams. For one of his favourite subjects his results for the practice tests he had done over several months were not what he hoped for.

He spent long hours revising and could recite a lot of the information that formed part of the curriculum.

He had read around the subject because he was so interested in it. It had given him a lot of insight into the subject and he had some interesting things to say.

Somehow, though, he couldn't translate that knowledge into good test results.

He decided to talk to his teacher. "What do I have to do to get a good grade?" he asked.

His teacher explained that exams have a marking scheme and that a good mark involves making sure you can tick a large number of the marking-scheme boxes.

James felt very frustrated.

“But the marking scheme doesn’t allow me to say anything really interesting about the subject,” he complained.

His teacher agreed but reiterated that, unfortunately, “ticking the boxes” was what was needed to get a good grade in the exam.

## **Looking at the teaching of the Gospel**

In today’s Gospel a man comes to Jesus and asks, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus first talks about the commandments – “You shall not murder... commit adultery... steal... bear false witness... defraud”.

But the man tells Jesus that he has kept these commandments all his life.

Then Jesus spots the problem.

Eternal life is about more than just keeping commandments. It is about attitude and priorities.

The man recognises there is something wrong for him, but he is disappointed when Jesus points out that it is his wealth that is preventing him from living in a way consistent with eternal life.

Jesus uses the encounter to teach the disciples about how hard it is to let go of the things that are preventing our true participation in the kingdom.

Peter feels threatened by his words.

“Look, we have left everything and followed you,” he says.

Jesus acknowledges the sacrifices but pushes the teaching further by explaining that the kingdom of God turns things upside down – “many who are first will be last, and the last will be first”.

## How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

The man who came to speak to Jesus was the polar opposite of James.

He recognised that something was missing, but he thought that ticking another box would fix it.

Jesus gave him one – to sell all he had – but that box was one that the man didn't want to tick.

However, Jesus' suggestion is really about much more than just a box-ticking exercise.

It involves a complete change in attitude and a complete change in orientation.

The problem for the man was that being wealthy and comfortable was a major part of his self-identity.

It wasn't that wealth itself was preventing him from finding eternal life, but it was preventing him from putting eternal life at the very centre of his being.

Eternal life is not something that can come in second place to anything else.

We can't have it and cling on to other things.

It's reminiscent of the story of the monkey who puts her hand in a jar to extract some juicy morsel of food, but can't get her hand out of the jar while her fist is closed.

Perhaps we would not put ourselves in the category of "rich", although many Western Christians are certainly rich compared to many others across our world.

But so many of us have things that we cling to.

We need God's miraculous work to bring about change so that we too can enter eternal life.

Like the man who approached Jesus, we may find the thought of letting go shocking.

Perhaps we are clinging to things we had never considered were holding us back.

It is worth considering our own identities.

Is being a part of God's kingdom our prime identity or just something we do alongside more important things?

**“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”**

*Mark 10:17*

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

**[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)**