Text: Mark 10:17-22

**Introduction**

The scholar Isaiah Berlin tossed off an essay – The Fox and the The Hedgehog – expanding on an old greek aphorism – The Fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing. And it became something of a parlor game. Toss out a famous name and ask, fox or hedgehog, and why. You could do it with actors. The fox being that actor with range who becomes every character, the hedgehog being often the superstar who turns every role into themselves. John Wayne the ultimate actor hedgehog always playing John Wayne. Maybe Heath Ledger as the fox disappearing into roles a different as Gay Cowboy, teen heartthrob and the Joker. You could play it with sports figures. Bill Belichick fox. Every game was a different game plan and he could beat you 1000 ways. Army or Navy hedgehog. You know they are running the ball. They’ve only got 4 plays. Can you stop them? Coming from a scholar it is usually played with thinkers or statesmen. Churchill – Hedgehog – Fight Germany. Bill Clinton – fox – always morphing that he picked up the nickname slick.

I’m not sure if it is exactly fair. I think he can be much more nuanced. But Luther is usually called out as one of the great hedgehogs. He knew one big thing – Law and Gospel. And everything in his theology is the application of that idea to life. But we modern Lutherans have lost an important part of his hedgehog insight. We’ve resolved Luther’s law and gospel tension that in this world we must live in, into a warm fuzzy blanket of gospel reduction. There is a reason that the small catechism starts with the 10 commandments – the law, moves onto the creed – the gospel, and then the Lord’s Prayer – where we learn to live in that tension. Both the law and the gospel are from God. And both are good. If we are unwilling to hear the law, we will probably lose the gospel. If we do not live out of the gospel, the law itself with crush us. In Luther’s day, the problem was the unwillingness to live out of the gospel. There was always another law. But in our day I tend to think we are at the other extreme. We don’t think much of the gospel because we are unwilling to take the law seriously. Even unwilling to hear it.

**Text**

Our Gospel reading today always sends me back to thinking about that big idea of law and gospel. I’ll call him the Rich Young Ruler because that is what tradition often calls him. This man is something of a hedgehog, he knows one big thing: He needs eternal life. He knows he is mortal. And maybe it is only the recognition of our mortality that sets us off on a spiritual quests. And that recognition of mortality for most times and places would have come rather early. It is only in our time that I often joke one can reach their 40’s before facing mortality. I think JK Rowling, the Harry Potter author, has something of the same thoughts with her magical creatures Thestrals. They were only visible by those who had known death. It is only Harry and Luna that can see them. Which is one of the human moments of those books.

But back to the rich young man. He asks Jesus what he has to do. And if you are in the realm of doing, you are in the realm of the law. And that is exactly the mirror that Jesus holds up to the man. “You know the commandments.” And he rattles off the second table of the law. And I know it is popular to assert or say that the man was blind to his own faults or he was looking into that mirror of the law falsely. But I have no reason to think so from the text. In fact I’d think the opposite. “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth. And Jesus looking at him, loved him.” When people normally start talking about seeking or spiritual quests, is when I would normally become deeply cynical. Our ability to lie to ourselves is astounding and most seeking is really a seeking to cover the truth, not uncover it. And certainly not to apply it to ourselves. But Jesus looking at this man loved him. I tend to think part of that love is a recognition of an honest seeker. The man is seeking the kingdom of God and its righteousness.

And that love takes a specific form. Likely, because the man was rich, he had never had a good teacher who would tell him the truth. The advice in Luther’s day would have been “go on a pilgrimage, see these relics, and buy yourself a plenary indulgence.” The answer of a Pharisee in Jesus’ day would probably have been, “Young Man, you are a good Jew. You keep the law. You make the sacrifices. You are in the covenant. Don’t let this things worry you.” There you have the two extremes of how we might resolve the tension of the law and gospel. We can create a new law, one that we can keep. Or we can dismiss the law because we are part of the covenant people, God’s favorites, so don’t sweat the details.

**Christology**

But the goodness and love of Jesus again holds up the mirror of the law to the man. His first attempt was the second table. Which is basically the foundation of what we’d call ethics. And the man was an ethical man. But he lacked something. Jesus holds up the first table of the law, the first commandment. He tells the man to go and sell everything he has, give it to the poor and follow Jesus. Jesus gives him the promise, “you will have treasure in heaven.” It is the law that you shall have no other Gods. Love the Lord your God will all your heart, soul, mind and strength. In his goodness and love Jesus gives him the command to do that. And it is that command – that law – that reveals his heart. “Disheartened, he went away sorrowful.”

The law of God is good and wise. It is the goodness and love of Jesus that has given us the law. For it is only by the law that we know our own hearts. It is only by Jesus’s command that the man knew he did not love God first, but he loved his own wealth.

And the God who is good and loves us continues to do this to us. It is the law that exposes the idols of the heart. It is the law that increases the sin, that brings about the death in our own members, such that even we can recognize our problem.

And our problem is that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Our problem is in the man’s first question. “What must I do?” And the answer is there is nothing we can do. We can make that fearless moral inventory. We can look in the mirror of the law in the clear light of day. We can admit to God, ourselves and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. But we can do nothing. Only God can remove these.

And Christ has removed them. There on that cross. And everyone who humbly on their knees goes to the foot of that cross, will find the good news. They have been removed as far as the east is from the west.

**Moral**

We are not all willing to go there.

The man was not willing to give up his idol of wealth. Idols don’t leave our hearts easily.

The stronger of us may not be willing to accept grace. There must be something I can do.

The foxier of us may find the idea of the cross all too hedgehog. There has to be another way. Surely I can negotiate a bit. I don’t need to look fully into that mirror. If God is as graceful as you say, I don’t need to be on my knees. He’d leave me some dignity. He loves me.

There are lots of different strategies for avoiding the foot of the cross.

But all of them are just ways of walking away disheartened and sorrowful.

Because this is the narrow gate.

**Eschatological**

Look in the mirror of the law and know. Consider our unworthiness.

And have faith. That God is who he says he is. The friend of sinners. The great physician. The father of of the prodigal.

Have faith that God will remove all that is necessary. And that in the process, we shall become everything we were created to be.

Have faith that we have treasure in heaven.

We are all beggars, but a strange kind. Beggars that have an inheritance.