**The Prize**

**By Rev. Sheryl Stewart**

Job 23: 1-9, 16 & 17 Hebrews 4: 12-16 Mark 10: 17-26

Psalm 22: 1-5, 22-26

**Summary: My goal is not to win the prize of everlasting life, but to be won as a prize worth winning by the Everlasting God.**

##  Job, sure that the disasters in his life were not the actions of a vengeful, punishing God proclaims his innocence. He trusts that God is in control; so, when bad things happen to good people, he is afraid. He is not afraid of the dark, but of God, since things just don’t make sense. As he takes on the role of judge, Job loses sight of the fact that God is god and he, himself, is not god. That is why, when God reveals Himself to Job later, Job repents, faced with a goodness, wisdom, and power that towers over his best efforts at righteousness.

 Hebrews clearly acknowledges that only Jesus is a worthy High priest, tempted as we are tempted, yet without sin. Remarkably, Jesus said that no one is good except God alone. Therefore, the question asked by the wealthy young man is all wrong.

 We’ve probably all had questions asked of us that make so many fundamentally wrong assumptions that any answer is misleading. Not surprisingly, we most often get this from our own children when they are young, but it gets tougher when the confusion is in an adult mind.

 I have dealt with this my whole life, frustrated that the term “transition” is already misleading people to think I have gone from one thing to another. You have all heard, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” That was true for me. Although many things did change about me and for me, I wasn’t changing as much as I was letting what was real come out. Nonetheless, this made for an impossible question when two dear friends asked me, “Did you want to become a woman because you failed at being a man?”

 First, that question assumes that I wasn’t a woman in the first place and had to become one. Second, my friends assumed I failed, when I felt I did a fair job at meeting expectations that just wouldn’t fit. Finally, they also thought that it is somehow easier to be a woman than a man, even when you haven’t been raised that way.

The question Jesus faced was even worse. “Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life” First, only God is good. Second, people cannot win that prize with any effort of their own. Finally, what God is doing about that very problem is standing right in front of the questioner!

After Jesus gives the young man a “how to” that is too much for him, he leaves in sorrow. Jesus’ amazed disciples finally ask an answerable question: “Who, then, can be saved?”

“With man, it is impossible,” Jesus says. “but with God, all things are possible.”

I cannot lift myself off the ground. However, with God on one side of me and Jesus on the other, I can be lifted. Even unto heaven! So, it is not that my efforts at holiness will win the prize of everlasting life; rather, it is that I am won, as a prize by the everlasting God. Since, I am God’s prize, why do I work so hard at being good? That is so that I might become a prize worth the winning!

Since we are each made in the image of God, the discipline of obedience is letting what is true and real, the divine, come out! Holiness is real change, real transition, but it is not an easier way or one that says anything about me. Holiness is all about God and what it means to say that God is love.

Therefore, we preach Universal salvation; We are not all winners; however, God is the winner, and He has won us all. Therefore, we keep asking people to join us: not because we have found the answer, but because the Answer has found us. So, let us leave worship today, not as seekers of a prize but as prizes already won. Let God, who is inside you, express Himself forever!