



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, PROPER 23, OCTOBER 10, 2021

1 JOB 23:1-9,16-17; PSALM 22: 1-15; HEBREWS 4:12-16; MARK 10:17-31

CLEARING A WAY TO ABUNDANCE

Mark 10:17-31 *[As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking 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.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”]*

A week ago, on Saturday, some of you attended the feast of St. Francis and the blessing of the animals. That day wound up being a big day for my family, as we were helping my 21-year-old son move out of the house. Well, mostly I was watching, bearing witness in moral support, while he was doing the heavy work. The day became more than a move, but a major purge and deep cleaning.

He took every stitch of clothing, cabinets, shelving and skateboards out and plopped everything down in our living room and dining room.

How on earth one room 10 feet by 10 feet filled up two larger rooms was beyond my husband and I, but it happened. My son sorted through each item, every treasure

from year's past and threw out, donated, or transformed it into something new.

At one point I looked outside, and he was power sawing the posts and headboards off his teenage bunk bed. Then, we cleaned the carpet and walls, washing away any musty smells that had built up over the years.

I suddenly re-winded to the day we moved in, when he was four years old, and the room was sparse.

To a simpler time, with more space to think and just be. The process felt like a restorative, clean start, a shedding of the old, and we all felt lighter.

In today's gospel reading, we hear the story of a man who struggles with letting go of his stuff. He asked Jesus how to obtain eternal life. He'd been following all the God-given laws since his youth, but Jesus challenges him: there's something more to be done - sell what you own, give to the poor and follow me. What a monumental ask! We don't have to guess how the man felt in response, we are told right in the text he was shocked and grieved, because he owned many possessions.

But notice right before he answered the inquiring man, Jesus did two very specific things: he looked at him, and he loved him.

Did Jesus know the inquiring man wasn't a "I'm going to drop everything this second" kind of guy? Maybe he suspected this was going to be a process.

So Jesus took him through a process of the heart, not just a process of the law: Be seen, Be loved, See the needs of others, Give, Follow me. All of the steps outlined here by Jesus reveals God's character of Love.

The man is seen as a beloved individual, with individual gifts and possibilities, worthy of being loved into transformation. They also reveal the man's nature and what's needed for his path to wholeness as an image-bearer of God.

Be seen, be loved, give, follow Jesus. These sound like the beginnings of a very fruitful spiritual practice.

Even more, they sound like Jesus laying down building blocks for a vision of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

He was responding to the man's question about life eternal and in a flash, provided actions to take to participate in things eternal.

Why would we follow these steps and follow Jesus?

Christians throughout history who have vowed lives of poverty and learned to

radically give, have insight for us regarding why.

In the book *Desert Mothers*, Mary Earle examines the paths and writings of 4 women who lived lives of poverty in the Egyptian desert in the 4th century.

She notes a trend in their writings, that they address a universal human temptation – to miss our lives by living completely on the surface.

There was something the Desert Mothers experienced in the stark desolation of the desert. Far from missing out on life, they had hit on life abundant. Maybe Jesus' suggestion to the inquiring man to sell his stuff, wasn't about the stuff, but about not wanting him to miss out on his life.

We see something similar in the life of St. Francis, whose life wasn't fundamentally about poverty, but fundamentally about love. Poverty was a means to love God and others, which in turn brought the deepest joy.

How do we step into this vision and follow Jesus today, and where might we end up if we did? We may or may not be called to a vowed life of poverty, but is there something we can all learn from its fundamental lessons?

Last week, we heard the verses immediately preceding today's gospel reading in Mark.

We heard Jesus say: "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

When I was 4 years old, my dad told me that Jesus resides with God in the "Holy of Holies."

It sounded like the truest thing I ever heard. As a 4-year-old, I didn't need a lot of theological discussion or explanation of what that place was.

I just knew there's an epicenter of love and holiness where God lives.

Today, I have plenty of layers of stuff blocking my way from standing under that epicenter.

Lots distracting me from participating in Jesus' step-by-step process. Like fears that I'll experience scarcity. Or undervaluing myself as being worthy or capable of transformation. So much stuff, it would take at least 2 trips to the county dump! But in my experience, it helps to remember my simple understanding of the Holy of Holies as a 4-year-old.

And today Jesus shines a practical light on how to stand under the roof of that Most High dwelling place here on earth. When I keep that all in mind, my spirit leaps when I hear the name Jesus! And eternal priorities

become easier. I pray to move into that place and live there on a daily basis.

While we don't have to wonder how the inquiring man felt in the gospel story today, I do wonder what he did next, because his story didn't end there.

Did he go home and clear out a space that offered childlike clarity, to think and to be? Did he learn how to see others and radically give?

Lifelong spiritual practices can be like waves carving the shore. An ebb and flow, being

loved and learning to give in love. Sometimes, it takes time to let God do the work that we can't do alone. Perhaps, down the line, the inquiring man found his way back. Moved by love, not just law.

May we be shaped into our truest children-of-God selves by being seen, being loved, giving to others, following Jesus. May we break bread together today and taste abundance. May it be on earth as it is in heaven.



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