

Enough
Mark 10:17-31
Sunday, October 11, 2015
Pentecost +20
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It certainly isn't a new story. We hear it and think we learn a lesson, but rarely do we hear the tale and think it is our story being told back to us. Once upon a time, there was a man. Some looked at him and saw a handsome, young man. Others noted his power as a ruler. But all who knew him knew him best for what he possessed; he was a very rich man.

He came from a family that raised him in the faith. He knew the scriptures and observed the high holy days. He was strategic but not unscrupulous. He was self-involved but not altogether lacking in integrity. He was, by every measure of the culture around him, wildly successful. There was a fear deep within him, though. A fear of scarcity and of weakness; a fear of asking someone else for what he needed most. And so it was that he gave most of his days for most of his years to accumulating wealth. He acquired property and watched as his staff grew each year—gardeners, cooks, advisors. His savings grew, his estate grew, and his worry grew. Now there was so much more to lose and so much to protect.

If he took a wife, then surely that was the piece missing from his perfect life. He found a suitable woman to marry who would help oversee the estate and work as an influential partner making connections with other people of means. She could throw lavish parties and dish with the other wives. She was popular and persuasive, and he knew she would be a great asset to him. They grew in their love for one another, welcomed children, and began to raise those children in the faith.

Yet, while it might quiet down every now and then, that same, nagging fear was still deep within him. Now he had even more to lose—a family, a reputation, more wealth than most of the world would ever know. He prayed for God to take his fear away and replace it with a confidence that he would be as successful in the next life as he was in this one. But month after month, that prayer seemed to go unanswered.

In his comings and goings, he noticed the teacher Jesus and his ever increasing crowd of followers. They never seemed to be in a hurry. No one knew where he lived. Some speculated that he didn't even have his own home but just relied on the hospitality of others for food and shelter. And Jesus didn't seem ashamed of this or uncomfortable in

the presence of the wealthy and the powerful. In fact, he seemed quite comfortable in the company of most anyone, and most everyone who spent any time with him tended to walk away feeling better, calmer, more focused, more at ease in the world. What was it about this Jesus?

Finally, the man had reached the breaking point. Barely sleeping night after night, his dis-ease and anxiety almost controlling him. He woke up knowing that he would go find Jesus, and find him he did. He had rehearsed the exchange so many times in his head, but when he found the good teacher, he fell down before him as though he was a leper in search of a last hope cure. "What must I do," he asked, "to inherit eternal life?" He blurted it out in an almost desperate way but was far too nervous to feel embarrassed. He realized the truth at the bottom of his question—what else can I do to know that I'm going to be okay? What else can I do to know that I can't fail and that everything will come together? What else can I do to control my success forever?

And Jesus heard that truth beneath the man's question, too. He began to ask the man some different questions to figure out who he really was, and the man was so sincere in how he answered. He was earnest and clearly afraid. As was often the case, Jesus was filled with compassion and knew he loved this man. He could see him as though they'd been talking for years, and Jesus knew that the man was more afraid of losing everything he knew and everything he'd acquired than he was ready to live a life that connected to the eternal Source.

The solution was obvious. You want to be healed of this nagging, growing fear? You want to be rid of it once and for all? Face the thing of which you're most afraid and then walk through it. Sell it all. The houses, the land, the businesses, the staff. Downsize, walk away, get rid of it all. And the question about inheriting eternal life wasn't the right question. What must I do for myself? What must I do to secure my own future? No, that's not what eternal life is all about. So give up the life to which you are so desperately clinging, and give all of your resources to those who have nothing. Give them some of your life. Then you'll start to figure out where eternal life begins.

The man just knelt there. He thought Jesus was going to comfort him and tell him he was doing all right. He thought Jesus might ask to come dine at his house today. He thought Jesus would surely touch his head and tell him, "Peace be with you, do not be afraid." But Jesus told him to walk back to his life and give into his worst fears. He wanted him to destroy the thing he had given his life to create. And the man began to weep. His heart broke in two as he realized he could never do as Jesus instructed. He gathered himself and rose to walk back to the only life he could imagine.

The disciples were shocked and confused by the scene they had just witnessed. Was the man there to be healed? Was he there to argue theology? What was Jesus talking about, and why was the man so grieved?

Jesus began to explain, but it seemed to perplex them further. If it was so hard to experience the kingdom of God, then who might ever be worthy enough to know God? They feared for their own security and reminded him of all they'd personally given up already. Would he ask for more?

Instead, he reminded them that their lives were connected to each other and that they were already on the Way. And the reward of living on this Way would begin right now, in this life. Eternity is a way of living and being so close to the God-ness of God that it begins to upend everything now and continues forever. They were puzzled. And more than a little afraid.

Pastors have attempted to pick up this difficult message and communicate it to all who will hear. Give the first fruits of your harvest as a reminder of God's provision. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all of these things will be given to you. Show me how you spend your money, and I'll show you where your heart is.

What must I do to inherit eternal life?

It's the wrong question.

The wrong emphasis.

The wrong understanding of life.

Not just that we can't *do* anything to sway our inheritance, but the question is about the man in the first place. What can *I* do to make sure *my* life is secure. What can I do to make sure that *I* make it into God's kingdom. The kingdom is a Way that starts now and not a destination in the future. The kingdom is realized when neighbors reach out in love not when the fearful reach out to craft their own security. The kingdom is the Way, and you can't hold much in your hands as you begin to travel it.

Karoline Lewis picks up this idea of wrong questions and explores a bit further as she considers Jesus' observation, "There is one thing you lack." "Beyond the fact that the rich man has too much, there's another part to the rich man's problem. He knows only to ask about safeguarding *his* eternal life without concern for that of others. 'What must *I* do,' he asks. He is unable to see that the potential to experience eternal life might very well lie outside of his own doing. He is incapable of recognizing that abundance may very well be found outside of the wealth and riches he has stored up. He insists that what he has procured is irrelevant to who he is or who he thinks he wants to be.

Where do you locate your abundance? Where does your abundance come from? Do you trust only yourself to make it possible? Lack takes on many forms in our life. This story asks us to ponder how we might complete the sentence, 'I lack _____.'

There is one thing you lack. And you need to figure that out. But the issue of lack takes on a particular meaning in this story -- it is that which prevents you from a full expression of faith. What is the one thing that is at the core of who you are, what keeps you from being the follower, the disciple, the believer, the witness God wants and needs you to be?"

We're entering a season for asking some good questions about ourselves. October somehow crept up on me, and here we are already on the second Sunday. Individually, this is the climb to the last big hill of the year's roller coaster as Halloween speeds to Thanksgiving which speeds to Christmas and New Year's and Mardi Gras. Zoom. Practically February. As a congregation, it's time to review our organizational structure, consider how our volunteer committees and teams might best serve the work of the church in 2016, invite new members into congregational life and leadership, and evaluate how our budget might best support the ongoing mission and ministries of St. Charles.

When we're considering our own lives and doing our planning as a church, we have to keep the right questions in front of us or we will walk away grieving as this man did that day. What kind of life most enables us to follow the Way of eternal Source? Where is that tension between the ideal and the possible?¹ What do we need to release that we might experience the Divine today?

The gospel lesson is about wealth but not about wealth. It's about discovering the kingdom of God in giving one's life away for the good of others. But it's also truly about the way we scurry around grabbing onto security as though we don't believe God is near. And we don't really like to talk about that because it grieves us to think the way we live might be incompatible with the way of God's kingdom. Lamar Williamson writes, "After we have done our best to make this text say something less upsetting to our system of values, Jesus looks intently at us and continues quietly to affirm that life is to be had not by accumulating things, but by disencumbering ourselves."²

Taking up the Jesus Way means letting some things go. I can't tell you what those things are for you, individually, but I can tell you the process of disencumbering

¹ wording from Lamar Williamson, *Interpretation: Mark*, p. 188

² Lamar Williamson, Jr., *Interpretation: Mark*, p. 188

ourselves is about learning to live with enough. That has something to do with possessions and resources, but it also has to do with learning what real abundance is about. I give from what feels like a small resource, and I discover there's enough for two of us. Three of us give and discover there's enough for six of us. On the Jesus Way, sometimes releasing isn't about allowing something to disappear but about discovering there's more than enough of everything we might need along the way when we release our grip on it. Enough food, enough clean water, enough shelter. Enough laughter, enough joy, enough love. Release everything that isn't really who you were created to be, and discover that you are enough already. Let us brave this discovery together. Amen.