

Wealth?

Mark 10:17-31

October 10, 2021

I am a firm believer that God meets us wherever we are in life. If we have no faith or understanding of the faith we have, God is there with us. If we are nominally churched or have been attending since birth, God is there with us. If we have faith the size of a mustard seed or the size of the universe, God is there with us. God is there offering grace and love to us, not because we have earned it, but because God is a loving God and cares about each of us on our various journeys of faith. (Pause) /

In today's gospel reading we encounter a man on a faith journey. This man is rich in many ways and yet he senses/knows something is missing in his life/journey. Regardless of everything he has, he is searching for more. What he has acquired in life, up to this point, isn't feeding him...not completely. There's this sense of urgency to him, we see it in how he approaches Jesus in a run. I imagine him speaking to Jesus half out of breathe/excitedly, "Good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life?" / (1)

That's a bold question, and we get the sense this guy has been searching for some time. Jesus speaks of the 10 commandments and this guy says, "Teacher, all of these I have kept since I was a boy." We get the sense he's trying to live into a life only God can give, one that he's heard about since he was a child. He knows the stories told in Torah, the life promised to his ancestors and ours. That of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He's longing for the kind of life that led the Israelites out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, landing them in the wilderness. He's in essence, looking for the promised land. And regardless of doing all the right things, being a good person, having wealth; he finds himself lost.

(pause) /

I think we all can relate to what this guy is going through in some way, fashion, or form. I suspect we have all had moments where we felt like something was missing in our lives. It's perhaps an emptiness, a longing for more. A time when we have been restless and in need. /

It's likely each of us could share a similar story. Something like, "Lord, I work hard. I value people and treat them as a neighbor. I pray all the time. I rarely miss a Sunday of worship. I treat my spouse (2)

and kid with love and respect. I have a good life. I have a nice home. I help out in the community. I coach soccer on the weekends. I should want for nothing and still... I desire something else.” /

The man's question is our question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”(pause) Jesus answers, “One thing you lack, go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” I can't speak for you all, but Wow! The Jewish community viewed poverty, at that time, as a burden, something to be avoid at all costs. The wealthy were considered to be blessed, somewhat set above others. So, by asking this man to give everything away, he's being told to give away his blessing. That creates a huge dilemma for this guy. That answer leaves him in a sort of limbo. Do as Jesus says, and have this eternal life, which was a new concept for Jews to consider, or keep his blessing of wealth. (pause) Kind of takes one's breath away. And it proves to be too much for the man. In that moment, he can't bring himself to do it and he walks away/grieving. (pause) / (3)

It's a question/test for the man of letting go and trusting Jesus. It's a matter of taking his faith to a different level of trust. Jesus is asking this man to leave behind the life he knows and understands, to in essence die, so that he might better live into the life that Jesus is teaching. /

It's not a matter of wealth. I don't think Jesus cares about the size of our bank accounts. It's not about the wealthy having access to eternal life by selling what they have and giving the money to the poor. The scripture tells us that Jesus loved this man. No, the issue here is about life more than money, though money does play its part. I don't think it's Jesus' intention to tell us what to do with our wealth. I think he is trying to show us what our wealth can do to us. How it at times can trap us into putting it above all else. How it can limit us from being the people God is calling us to be. /

Maybe you don't consider yourself wealthy. That's a fair thought to have, but considering the following:

A single person income of \$25,000 dollars after taxes and tithing puts you in the top 8% of the world's wealthiest people. / (4)

A married family of 4, 2 adults/2 children with a after tax/after tithing income of \$50,000 is among the top 12% of the wealthiest people in the world. /

That's all according to www.howrichami.givingwhatwecan.org, if your interested in plugging in your own finances. I hear/see that kind of information and I don't know whether to laugh or cry, feel blessed or guilty. That's not a lot of money, and it's so much more than most have. It comes down to perspective and I also believe it is a matter of heart. (pause) /

This text, it has some teeth to it. It nips at us, doesn't it? We often think of it in terms of being about wealth, our money, and we dismiss the idea that it might have something to do with how we live our lives. "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." /

Michael K. Marsh, rector of St. Philip's Episcopal Church put it this way saying: (5)

“I think that’s also why Jesus answered the man by talking about money. Too many of us are looking for what a friend of mine described as a “hearse with a trailer hitch.” We want to take it all with us. /

We don’t get to do that. Someday we will leave behind the life we have created for ourselves, the possessions we have acquired, and the wealth we have accumulated. It might be next week, in five years, or thirty years. Or we can choose to make it today. That’s what Jesus asked of the man in today’s gospel. It is what he asks of us. We can choose this day to let go, to die before we die. /

It means that we allow our spirit to rise above ourselves. We don’t take ourselves more seriously than we take God. It means our life is to be found in Christ not in wealth and possessions. We live from a security other than savings and insurance. Our primarily investment is not in our retirement but in our neighbor. Ultimately, it means we do not create our own life, we receive life, we inherit it. We are not owners of our life but stewards and caretakers of God’s life in the world, each other, and ourselves.” (long pause) / (6)

////(Slowly) So take some time. What would your life look like if you did this? How would it be different? Can you think of 1 or 2 concrete changes you'd make if you shift from living your life, to being a caretaker of God's life in this world? /

I stated earlier that God meets each of us where we are on our faith journey. God's been there with us our entire lives and that is beautiful and humbling. That doesn't mean that God won't challenge us. I find today's gospel reading incredibly challenging. What's the wealth in your life that could be used to love our neighbors? What's God challenging you to offer up to those in need that's hard to give? Is God speaking to your heart this morning, and if so, how are you going to live into what God is saying? Amen. ////