

Mark 10:17-31 Pastor Bill Uetrict 10/11/09 19 Pentecost

Last week it was divorce and remarriage. Now there's a popular topic. This week it's money and possessions. Come on, Jesus! Have a little pity on us preachers. We tend to be people who want to be liked. This is not going to make us likable. You are entering some very uncomfortable territory when you talk about money. I got to be honest with you, Jesus. Money's pretty important. It's near and dear to most of us. And our stuff, well, it's an extension of us, part of how we secure our futures. Go messing with our money and our possessions and then you are messing with what matters to us, where our hearts are. So why did you bring this topic up in the first place?

I have to admit that I really like the guy who ran up to you and asked you how it is that you get the good stuff in life, how it is that inherit eternal life. Jesus, this guy is humble. He kneels before you. And he is seeking something. What more could you ask from him? It is only those who seek who eventually find something. We religious types have a soft spot for seekers, don't we? And note. He's quite respectful. He calls you "good" —a good rabbi, a good teacher. Why could you have just not accepted that? Oh no, you had to respond, "Why do you have to call me good? No one is good, except God alone." You are always unsettling things.

You do point the humble rich guy to the standards of the good life: the commandments—not stealing, not committing adultery, not defrauding, not bearing false witness, honoring the parents. And note, Jesus. The rich guy has kept all the commandments. What a good guy! He's probably been faithful to his wife, took care of his aging parents, didn't steal things. You would probably like to live next door to this man. What more could you ask?

Of course, you have an idea: sell what he owns and give the proceeds from the garage sale to the poor. And then he is to come and follow you, receiving treasure from the realm of God. You are a problem, Jesus. This guy has a lot of stuff, a lot of money. Notice that he goes away from you grieving. How could he divest himself like that? I mean, when you have a little and give it away that probably isn't such a big deal. But when you have a lot, divesting all of it is overwhelming. I mean, what you've got has everything to do with who you are. You've centered your life on getting this. And more than likely, it took a lot of work. Generally, you don't get to the top without a lot of effort, without some practical smarts, without dedication or determination. What are you expecting from this man, from us?

To let go? To follow you, to get a life that really matters means to let go. Oh, that's hard. That's really hard. Everything that the culture teaches me says that I need to grasp tightly. Letting go is risky. It scares me. If I let go, what will be there to protect me? Letting go brings me to a sense of vulnerability. It requires so much . . . trust. I have to be honest with you, Jesus. Money and stuff have never been overly enthralling to me. I mean, it's nice to get a new bike once in awhile, take a couple of trips. But for me, stuff is a headache. The more you've got the more you've got to organize, the bigger storage spaces that you need, the more time you spend moving junk from place to place. My Dad spent three years cleaning out his Dad's house. And what was he supposed to do with the 32 rakes that he found?

Oh, I know, that is a sign of the kind of world we live in. When we moved into the huge house next door I thought we would never fill it up. Wrong! And yes, I've heard that we now live in a country that has more square feet dedicated to storage spaces than to public schools.

And yes, I know that the average Lutheran gives less than two percent of his or her income to the ministry of the church. There is something unique about stuff and money that sucks us in. That's why you must talk so much about it. You talk a lot more about money than you do about salvation, hell or even sex, what so many in the church seem to love to talk about these days. Maybe if we talk about them we won't have to talk about the things that really matter to us. Maybe talking about them is a good avoidance technique.

But you don't avoid the sacred cows. You are really quite straight forward: "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God, [to line up with what God is doing in the world]!" Yes, you are really funny sometimes. I appreciate your sense of humor: "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." That really is a funny image. A camel going through a needle. A camel is quite big. A needle is quite little. Sounds pretty impossible to me. You really do have a sense that money can be very confining, all consuming, don't you? Your thoughts are really astonishing. If rich people don't have the good life, who can get it?

Those who let go? But truthfully, as I said before, money and stuff are not too compelling to me. I agree they run the culture, shape the lives of many of us. But personally, I like letting go of it. I love giving it away. Sharing ten percent of my income with the church and with others is fun to me. And there is nothing like cleaning out the basement and taking the stuff over to Goodwill. Just last week I reduced my collection of 40 sweaters to 36.

What do you mean "la de da?" And more significantly, why do you keep reminding me that following you means letting go? I note that you

didn't tell all the people who followed you that they had sell everything and give to the poor. Others you told to let go of their families and their work. What do you mean, what are you holding onto so tightly? So much, I know. Maybe it's my intellect. Maybe it's the church. Maybe it's my kids. Maybe it's my dream of what life **should** be. Maybe it's my past. Maybe it's my job. Maybe it's my friends. Maybe it's my world view. Maybe it's my politics, my country. Maybe my not letting go of any and all of those things can keep me from the truly good stuff in life.

You invite me to let go. You let go of goodness: "Why do you call me good; only God is good." You let go of the man who came to you seeking the good life. And eventually you let go of all. If your cross is anything, Jesus, it is the ultimate in letting go. You would not grasp at life. You would not manipulate it. You would not force it to come out the way you wanted it to. You would not play the cultural games or give into power politics. You would not live a life protecting yourself, defending yourself, keeping yourself from risk or harm. You lived by trust. It's as if you know that life is given, not manufactured or created by us. You seem to know that life at its best is not grasped, but received.

Jesus, I didn't overlook the fact that when you were talking with the rich man and said to him that he needed to sell what he owned and give the proceeds to the poor, you looked at him with love. It's love that wants us to let go, isn't it? It's love that wants to set us free from that which enslaves us. Keep loving that rich man, Jesus! Maybe he'll turn around and come back to you and end up following you. Keep loving me, too! Keep loving me, so that I will learn to let go, learn to be

generous, learn to surrender myself to relationship—relationship with you and your people. Yes, that's where I'll find the good life.