

Sermon: "Remembering Jesus"

Mark 10:17-31

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Two years ago, when our granddaughter Abby was 3 ½, we visited her in ABQ; and as we prepared to leave, I went to her room to say good-bye. In her hand were these pretty pink plastic "crystal" beads, remnants of a broken piece of play jewelry. I could tell that she treasured them.

She held them out to me and said, "Grandma, I want to give these to you so you will remember me." Her eyes regarded me with such love that I was deeply touched.; it brought tears to my eyes. It has always been very difficult for Abby to say Goodbye! I assured her that I would put the jewels in a special place and never lose them.

A month or so later she came with her family to visit us, and I showed her the small dish on my dresser where I had put the jewels. I told her I had taken good care of them and that I thought of her each time I looked at them.

She put them in the palm of her hand and quietly admired them. I watched her, and could see how precious they were to her -- and the change-of-mind that was taking place. Then she looked at me and said, "I think I need to take these back. They belong to my mother, and she will miss them!"

How difficult it can be to give up something that is dear to us! ///

The story of Jesus' encounter with the rich man is a similar story, of someone who finds it difficult to give up treasures.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to encounter the Cross, and he is intent. As he is walking, the rich man runs and kneels before Jesus, literally stopping his progress on the road. This man is also intent -- on getting an answer to his question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Even though he considers himself a righteous man, he senses there is something more required of him, and he needs to know. He believes he has followed the law; he has more money than he will ever need; he considers himself a good man; why then, is he restless?

Jesus ignores his question, and clarifies first what is truly Good – only God – and that God is the source of all that is good. "Good" is defined as moral perfection; and all that is called "good" somehow participates in the goodness of God and God's creation.

"Goods" – with an "s" – simply means material things that are treasured because they satisfy a selfish "need" within us. "Goods" do not reflect God's glory, but simply exist to please us. This is the rich man's dilemma: he cannot give up his "goods" because he doesn't recognize where "the good" resides.

It is curious that Jesus lists one of the commandments to be 'Do not defraud', for it is not contained in the original tablets and indicates that Jesus is exposing the man's particular vice: criminal deception for personal gain. This is a much greater offense than coveting one's neighbor's belongings.

And yet, knowing this man's faults, Jesus loves him!

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Wealth during biblical times was seen as a blessing from God, so wealthy people were honored and powerful in the community. This man thinks well of himself, but it isn't enough; his heart is still searching for fulfillment that his wealth has not satisfied. Even as blessed as others consider him to be, he wants to know he is eternally blessed.

Actually, he is rather heartsick over the idea that his life has not measured up in some way. He realizes that whatever he seems to be on the outside, and despite his faithful and pious life, he's still missing something, something important, something that matters, something that's a matter of life and death. This is why Jesus looks on him with love. He sees the struggle in the man's heart, and he knows what will heal him.

However, giving up all he has is not the answer the rich man is expecting! He hopes to get his way **without any real cost**. He has asked, "What can I do?" perhaps assuming it would be another law to check off his list!

Jesus sees all that this guy has – his knowledge of the law, his seemingly perfect piety, his abundant wealth –
--- and also his distorted sense of himself, of God, and of his neighbor.

Jesus hears the man's declarations of perfect obedience to the Commandments and redirects him to the truth:

what person can honestly say he or she has been perfectly kind and honest toward others at all times?

Maybe Jesus tells him to divest his wealth so that he can learn to live with trust in God and in solidarity with neighbor for the first time in his life, which would be like having treasure in heaven.

The word “possessions” is a metaphor that describes any hindrance that prevents us from serving Jesus fully.

The one thing we lack is the inability to give up SELF. We, too, want to know **the real cost of discipleship**. **What will it cost** us to inherit eternal life? Our treasures and trinkets? Volunteering at the church three to four hours a week? It is not what we have, but what we do with what we have.

Eternal life cannot be inherited by “goods” or “good works”. Entering the Kingdom is not about “being good” in the first place. Eternal life is a gift, freely given; but it **has a cost** --- which is to share in the hardships and needs of our fellow human beings, that brings a greater reward:

Joy of relationship;

joy in working together toward a common goal;

joy in seeing someone else prosper because we have been supportive in their success. I think of teachers, nurses, doctors, philanthropists, **all who give of self to benefit others**.

Jesus is not saying that we must literally die or give up absolutely everything we have, but to live sacrificially, making not only our needs, but the needs of our community part of our purpose. If we are not willing to die to self we are not willing to follow His ways.

But Jesus knows how difficult it is for us to give up the “shiny things” of life, especially when we have become accustomed to them and are thus blinded to the great need around us. Yet, Jesus remains firm! This is a requirement of life in the kingdom of God.

What is possible? Not for us to be Good in God’s sense of perfect goodness, but to be found good enough by the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Jesus exclaims how hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. He does not condemn but observes, that the rich become self-sufficient and forget that God is the Source of all they have. It is only through God’s grace that we receive anything at all!

The kingdom of God is not a place, but a way of life in any place that creates a better life for all. The Kingdom of God describes a life of community, caring for the interests of others, whether they are near, or far.

The disciples wonder, as we do: “Then who can be saved?” Is it truly impossible? Jesus makes it clear: all things are possible, with God. Without God, we are lost.

JESUS ENCOURAGES US TO GIVE GIFTS OF TIME, EFFORT, AND SPIRIT.

What is precious to you, so precious that it is difficult to let go?

Discipleship is relational, with Jesus, and with our friends on earth, sharing our lives and revealing God’s goodness among ourselves. This describes the kingdom of God.

Jesus' urging to give up self is too difficult for the rich man to grasp. His unwillingness to share with his community leaves him outside the hope of the kingdom of God, for he has given up something more precious –

a life of well-being and peace within his community.

We are familiar with the phrase, "God isn't finished with me yet!"

As the man walks away in distress, I hope that the man might reconsider his life. Jesus confronts us with a truth about ourselves that shocks us – and brings us to repentance and change. All things are possible with God!

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As for Abby and her change of mind about giving me her lovely pink crystal beads: as hard as it would have been for me to give up such a precious gift, I told her she could take them back home with her if she wished.

After she left for ABQ, I went to my dresser and saw that the beads were still in the dish -- and now, when she comes to our house, she goes to the bedroom to admire them – but she always puts them back!

Maybe Abby has decided it is more important to be remembered for her gift than to keep it. When I look on the beads each morning, I remember not only Abby, but also these words:

"It is in giving that we receive."

God loves faithfully, with a commitment that surpasses hardships and persecution

God loves generously – and sacrifices all for his beloved people.

God loves eternally – and has given the ultimate gift of love for us – in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God loves tenaciously – for God will not let us go!

Remember God's tenacious love for you! Wear it in your smile as you approach others!

Share YOUR love, no matter what hardships you must endure, for God has given you power to love, even in the most hopeless circumstances, and it will bring healing in the end.

Remember: "It is in giving that we receive."

And it will be your treasure, in this life in the Kingdom of God, and in heaven.

Remember Jesus' intentional Journey to the Cross,

and his complete giving of Self, and that we are thus redeemed.

LOVE NEVER FAILS. IT IS STRONG AS DEATH. (Song of Sol. 8:6)