

Sermon presented by Br. Jude Hill, SSF

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Church of the Advent of Christ the King, San Francisco

Mark 10: 17-31

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.'

This passage today that we hear from Saint Mark's Gospel is my favorite in the whole of the Scriptures. I think it is the most beautiful passage there is, and sets out for us the incredible nature of the unique relationship that God has with each of his children.

You've heard me over the past months get excited about the Gospel according to Mark.... it's starkness, it's directness, it's honesty and it's down to earth-ness. And here again we have another profound illustration of that clarity that comes across from Mark.

Jesus is about to set off on a journey, and we are told a man comes up to him (in the other Gospels he is called a Rich Young Ruler) and he asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. A reasonable question; one that deserves a straightforward answer – and he gets

that: "Do not commit adultery.... do not steal..... do not defraud..... honor father and mother..... etc..... obey the commandments...." We all know the list. Well if he'd been a wise fella he'd have left it at that point and said "Thanks very much rabbi, I seem to be on track.... have a nice journey..... safe travels..... see you in heaven"..... But no.... He was bragging, 'Teacher I have kept all these since my youth.' Sort of, *'aint I good...?'*

Or in reality did he know there was something more he needed to do? Did he know that something just didn't quite sit right with him in the response of Jesus...? 'What more do I need to do?'

Then we hear those incredible words that appear only in Mark's version of this story. Even though this story appears in Matthew and Luke, only in Mark does it say: "Jesus, looking at him, **loved him.....**" – **LOVED him** – "and said....."

[then we have it, the real kick in the stomach.....] "You lack one thing.... go sell what you own, give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven then come follow me". Wow.....

Jesus looking at him - LOVED HIM. What was it that Jesus saw in that man when he looked at him that made him love him? Was it the misguided youth who thought from an early age that the way to salvation could be bought by legalistically following the commandments but who had lost a contact with reality, who had been led astray by the lures of the world? Was it that Jesus saw NOT that having possessions was wrong but that for some of us they can block us from really seeing what life is all about; they can blind us to our own call to follow; they can lead us from the way of salvation?

The fascinating thing is that Jesus did not condemn this man. In fact he wasn't saying anything about his way of life or how he was living or how he should live. When the man asked him how he should live to inherit eternal life, Jesus told him "fulfill the commandments." End of story..... Jesus answered the questions and left it there. It was only when the man continued his questioning that Jesus continued to point out to him the truth of the emptiness he saw in **his** eyes: the emptiness of his narrow

world; the things that were blocking him from truly seeing the real treasures of the world around him and in him. Jesus invited him to see these and to find a way from being imprisoned by them and gaining a new way of life with him and with his disciples. 'Come follow me.....'

BUT when the man can't do this....

Jesus then allows him to go away. He doesn't say, "well put it all in a storage locker and come follow me" or "give half away" or "save some for when or if you come back." No, Jesus knew his only salvation was by giving it all away. Only that could release him from the prison of his own making. And so Jesus allows him to go away, grieving, sad, downcast....because he couldn't do it.

I wonder how Jesus felt at that moment? How much sadness was there in him as he left for his journey? How often did he think of that man on his journey? Did he wonder about him? I like to fantasize that one day, perhaps days or months later, that rich young man caught up with Jesus, and this time he was in his rags

and had given everything away and sought out Jesus.....and responded to the Lord's call to follow. Free from his imprisonment.

This passage of Scripture can give us enough to meditate on for a whole lifetime. It speaks to me of my relationship with the living God who looks into my eyes and who can see into the very depths of my being and who speaks to the center of who I am and challenges me at my core. And it speaks to me of a God who is an invitational God – a God who constantly invites me into relationship with him but who never demands and never forces, and who never blackmails or manipulates me, but who lovingly invites and allows me to say YES or NO, and who will allow me to go away, heavy hearted and emptied handed if I chose the 'no.' A God who is constantly, as the Father in the Prodigal, out scanning the horizon searching for me and always ready to welcome me home, but never forcing me, just offering me love and a way that will make me whole and make me realize how loved I am.

Jesus knew when he looked into the eyes of the wealthy young man just what it was that was preventing him from wholeness, from

inheriting eternal life, but not 'til the man pushed Jesus did he tell him. And then Jesus still gave the man the choice to take the invitation or not..... and in our story, he chose not to..... but the love with which Jesus gazed into him will have marked his very being and his life will have been changed by that encounter. Life was, no matter what happened, never the same for that young man. And when **we** have the courage to look the Lord in the eye and ask him what we need to do to come to that place of wholeness, of deep insight into our own spiritual journey, and when **we** can listen to his voice speaking to us and inviting us to new life in the depths of our being, then we will be changed in one way or another. We cannot help but be.

It reminds me of Robert Frost's poem:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I marked the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

"And Jesus looked at him and LOVED him.... and he went away
grieving." He hadn't the courage to choose the road less travelled.

Have we? Whatever that is for each of us!

Amen.