

Discipleship Moment

Sermon Text: Mark 10:17-31

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” That was the question we heard in Sunday’s gospel lesson. The young rich man approached Jesus and asked this poignant question. Pastor Ben mentioned how impressive this question actually is; this young rich man recognized something beyond his wisdom, that eternal life is inherited. Did you wonder, yesterday, how this young man could be so wise? Let me ask this question instead: how do you think he got rich? If he was young it would be *very* impressive if he was able to, by craft or business, become wealthy; but, more likely than not, his wealth was inherited. This young man knew about inheritance. He lived by his inheritance, he couldn’t live without it. So, when Jesus offered eternal life, the rich young man left with his head hung low. How could he give up his trust fund? That is how he lived! This young man knew how to take, how to inherit; but when it came to giving up, he fell short. When Jesus asked about obeying the “horizontal” Commandments (those commandments addressing our relationship with other people) the young man could say, without a doubt, “I have obeyed these since childhood.” This young man knew how to take care of others. If I had to guess, it is because when you take care of others, you’re taken care of. There is a little bit of selfishness when any of us are generous or helpful: we know that, through help, reputation, or repayment we will somehow see that good deed come back to us. This young man was shrewd, wise beyond his years, but couldn’t look past his own idol: his money.

Earlier in Mark (chapter 9), Peter, James, and John witness something spectacular: Jesus being transfigured. Jesus takes these three men up on a mountain where Jesus is surrounded by light—his clothes, face, and appearance become dazzling. Elijah and Moses appear by Jesus’ side and voice from heaven says “This is my beloved son...” In the midst of this majesty—glorious, heavenly majesty—Peter says to Jesus “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” Jesus just ignored him. Peter, not knowing how to respond to this majesty, created a religion: “let us make three tents” he said—three temples to house this spiritual experience. Let us keep this majesty and this heavenly experience here, on the mountain, between the six of us. You all can stay in your tents and let us humans go back down the mountain and deal with the world. Peter wanted the spiritual experience to stay on the mountain.

Peter and the young man are not very different in these two stories (although the stories are very different). They were both confronted with Jesus: Peter with the glorified Jesus, and the rich young man with the call of Jesus to “Follow me.” And both men wanted to control their experience with Jesus. They both wanted to be in charge of the experience. Peter tried to be in charge by using religion “let us make temples for you” surely, given the opportunity, Peter would have ushered crowds up to see the glorified Jesus with Moses and Elijah: capitalizing on the experience. And the rich young man wanted to receive the inheritance of eternal life on his terms, not on Jesus’ condition to follow him. The young rich man wanted a relative who passed away to give him an inheritance that he could live off of with no questions asked. He wanted a dead relative but instead got a living God who wanted his allegiance and demands relationship with people. Peter wanted lifeless religion, but instead got a glorified Jesus who could be touched, spoken to, who would flip tables and heal lepers. Both of these men wanted to control the situation.

But Jesus doesn’t work like that. You can’t live like a glutton off of God’s grace, and you can’t put God in a box and try to control him by religion. Jesus’ call to “follow me” demands that we live in relationship with Jesus. We need to speak to him, listen to him, know him, love him, be obedient to him. The inheritance of eternal life is not a post-mortem inheritance; it is a *living inheritance*. This inheritance is given to us in the relationship we have with God. The good news is that it starts now. Eternal life begins now with all its peace, joy, love, and confidence. The bad news (for our selfish desires) is that God puts a demand on us: that we follow Jesus and love God through Jesus, that we be filled by the Holy Spirit, empowered to know God and do good works, convicted of our sins and brought to repentance. This is done so that we may know God and love him.

Which doesn’t seem so bad to me.

Going Deeper

1. Why do think the young man went away sad? Are there things in your life you don't want to give up? What would it take you to give it up?
2. Do you have favorite traditions at church? What are they? How do they bring you closer to Jesus?
3. Do you feel like you know Jesus as the living Lord of your life? Do you speak to him often? Do you consciously think about him?
4. What are some ways you can remind yourself about Jesus and his work during your day? Saying the Lord's Prayer? Reciting the Creed? Making the sign of the Cross? Think of one or two small things you can do to remind yourself about Jesus during the day, and do them!
5. If Jesus called you to follow him today, what would he ask you to give up? What would he tell you to get rid of to follow him? Safety? Security? Money? Sports? Gambling? Alcohol? Your family?
6. Ask God to release you from those things so you can follow Him. Decide in your heart that you are ready to give up everything to follow Jesus, and pray that God do that in your life.