

Mark 10:17-31

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." 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." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age--houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions--and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

As an additional text for this morning's sermon, I would like to share a quote from an internationally known author who did the bulk of his creative work here in La Jolla. His 60 plus books have topped many bestseller lists, sold over 600 million copies, and been translated into more than 20 languages while securing for him two Academy awards, two Emmy awards, a Peabody award, and the Pulitzer Prize. This particular quote, from a book that I'm guessing will be familiar to you all, is from Dr. Theodor Geisel's "How The Grinch Stole Christmas." Every Who Down in Whoville Liked Christmas a lot...

But the Grinch, Who lived just north of Whoville, Did NOT! The Grinch hated Christmas! The whole Christmas season! Now, please don't ask why. No one quite knows the reason. It could be his head wasn't screwed on just right. It could be, perhaps, that his shoes were too tight. But I think that the most likely reason of all, May have been that his heart was two sizes too small.

I think that it is only appropriate for me to begin by making a confession. Though I am very happily a member of the Episcopal Church, having been duly received into the communion by our bishop the Rt. Reverend James Mathes, I secretly consider myself a Wesleyan Anglican. Being raised and ordained in the United Methodist Church I am deeply moved by the Rev. John Wesley's reforming zeal and passionate love for the poor. Now, as an ardent Episcopalian, I am deeply grateful for his persistent affirmation of and love for his Anglican roots. Rev. Wesley staunchly resisted any efforts by his followers to form a new church, and it was literally over his dead body that the Methodist Church in England was born. I am quite certain that John is proudly wearing his Anglican name tag at any and all heavenly banquets.

However, John and his brother, the Rev. Charles Wesley, were preachers and evangelists and not scholars, and therefore did not produce a volume of systematic theology. Methodism is built on 4 books...the Bible, the Book of Discipline, the Hymnbook (thanks to Charles' voluminous songwriting) and a collection of 144 of John's sermons. Today, I want to steal shamelessly from sermon #50 by the Rev. Wesley entitled, "The Use of Money."

Since I do not have the luxury that the Rev. Wesley had of being able to preach without a clock, I will summarize his nine page single spaced text into something we can digest in the time we have this morning. I do think that the voice of this committed Anglican, speaking to us from the cauldron of the Industrial Revolution in England still has wisdom for us today. He writes: "'The love of money,' we know, 'is the root of all evil;' The fault does not lie in the money, but in them that use it. It may be used ill: and what may not? But it may likewise be used well: In the hands of his children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked: It gives to the traveler and the stranger a place to lay his head. By it we may supply the place of a husband to the widow, and of a father to the fatherless. We may be a defense for the oppressed, a means of health to the sick, of ease to them that are in pain; it

may be as eyes to the blind, as feet to the lame; yes, a lifter up from the very gates of death!"

"It is therefore of the highest concern that all who fear God know how to employ this valuable talent; And, perhaps, all the instructions which are necessary for this may be reduced to three simple rules, by which we may approve ourselves faithful stewards of God's blessings. "The first of these is this -- 'Gain all you can.' Here we may speak like the children of the world: We meet them on their own ground. And it is our bounden duty to do this: We ought to gain all we can gain, without buying gold too dear, without paying more for it than it is worth. But this it is certain we ought not to do; we ought not to gain money at the expense of life, nor at the expense of our health.

"Having gained all you can, by honest wisdom and unwearied diligence, the second rule of Christian prudence is this, 'Save all you can.' Do not throw the precious talent into the sea. Do not throw it away in idle expenses, which is just the same as throwing it into the sea. Expend no part of it merely to gratify the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life."

"But let not anyone imagine that they have done anything valuable by going thus far, that is by 'gaining and saving all you can.'" All this is nothing, if you do not go forward, if all this gaining and saving does not point to a greater end. No one can properly be said to save anything, if all you do is save it up. You may as well throw your money into the sea, as bury it in the earth. And you may as well bury it in the earth, as in the Bank. Not to use it, is effectively to throw it away. Therefore, 'add the Third rule to the two preceding. Having first, gained all you can, and secondly saved all you can, Then 'give all you can.'" ...

"I entreat you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, live up to the dignity of your calling! No more sloth! Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might! No more waste! Cut off every expense which fashion, caprice, or flesh and blood demand! No more covetousness! But employ whatever God has entrusted you with, in doing good, all possible good, in every possible kind and degree to the household of faith, and to all humanity. Give all you have, as well as all you are, a spiritual sacrifice to Him who withheld not from you his Son, his only begotten Son..." – end quote.

So there you have it: three simple rules to guide our use of money. And they are essentially the rules that Jesus offered to the rich young ruler. Having gained all he

could, and saved all he could, he found that giving all he could was a stumbling block on his journey to sainthood.

I believe that there are at least two kinds of Saints in our world. Some people have the capacity to alter the inner landscape of our lives. They open our hearts and minds to the love of god. They apply a healing balm to the anger and pain we carry, and relieve us from the guilt and shame that weigh us down. They illuminate the saving grace of the scriptures and through prayer, meditation and forgiveness we discover that the inner landscape of our lives has been transformed from darkness to light, from despair to hope, from death to life.

Other people have the capacity to alter the outer landscape of our lives. Using the work of their hands and the sweat of their brow they have accumulated wealth that they devote to the construction of churches, the building of hospitals, the creation of museums, the feeding of the hungry, the housing of the poor, the celebrating of human creativity through theaters and performance halls, the building of libraries and the sustaining of colleges and universities. And through their philanthropy we discover that the outer landscape of our lives has been transformed from darkness to light, from despair to hope, from death to life.

Without the lives and loves of all these Saints, the church and the world would be deeply impoverished. I know that John 3:16 isn't a part of the readings for today, but I do believe that it captures for us the essence of Christian Stewardship: God so loved the world, that he gave...

The question before us then is how much do we love the world? How much will we give to alter the inner and outer landscapes of our lives? And as you ponder those questions, bear in mind the wisdom of your friend and neighbor Dr. Seuss, that the size of your gift doesn't depend as much on the size of the need, or the size of your wallet as it does on the size of your heart.

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