

**“Jesus’ Dialogue with the Rich Young Ruler:
The Challenges and the Promises”**

Sermon Notes by the Rev. Arnold Bush, Mark 10:17-31, Proper 23B,
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Text: Amos 5:6-7,10-15; Psalm 90:12-17; Hebrews 4:12-16; Mark 10:17-31

Sermon Theme: Jesus said, “One thing you lack.” Or paraphrased, You seem to be attached to your wealth of possessions; can you detach yourself from some of your possessions by giving this to the poor? Or paraphrased another way: “You have a lot of ‘stuff’ can you ‘unstuff’ yourself so you can give your ‘stuff’ to the poor?” A Challenge: Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever had left home, relatives...or fields for me and the gospel will not fail to receive a hundred times in this present age.” (A Promise)

I Introduction the Challenge

This morning let’s look at the CHALLENGE AND THE PROMISE in this gospel story of the dialogue between Jesus and this rich young ruler. Attachments to some things and activities are hard to let go. Here are three examples of “difficult downsizing” in our culture: (1) Have you ever moved a parent or relative into an assisted living center from a home of 40 years? They have to give up driving, a king sized bed, a couch, 3 bedroom home, garage, beautiful backyard, the close neighbors of 30 years, a place to entertain friends, etc. (2) Have you ever downsized from a large house to a smaller home? (3) Have you ever known a person with a serious heart condition, high blood sugar, internal ulcers, depression, loss of energy, liver disease and after a five day examination in one of the best medical centers the states. The physician says,
“Sir, If you want to live past 50, you must detach yourself from too many unhealthy lifestyle behaviors.” You fill in the recommendations: 3 balanced meals a day, rest, exercise, cut back on alcohol

consumption, remove stressors, stop worrying about all your possessions.

In the gospel story, the rich young man has a lot of wealth and possessions. He comes to Jesus, kneels down and asks, "What must I do inherit eternal life?" *I have kept all the commandments ever since I was a child; I have not murdered, committed adultery, stolen, or accused others falsely,* But Jesus loved him and looked at him and said, "You lack one thing." *Sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, then come, and follow me.*" This was a hard thing to say to this young man. Here is the challenge in this story for him and for us: He had such an attachment to his wealth of possessions that he could not let go. In conversing with retired persons whose financial resources were all in stocks and bonds, they said, "Why? If I give all my resources to the agencies to help the poor, I will then be poor and cannot give to their need in the years ahead." So how do we apply this command of Jesus to our lives? One commentator said this seems to be where Jesus is speaking to an individual and not to the church at large. So let's use reason to dismiss this as not applicable to us. But **SELL SOMETHING, DO GIVE TO THE POOR, THEN ADOPT A LIFESTYLE THAT IS COMING TO JESUS AND FOLLOWING JESUS.** Here the writer of Mark is making sure the New Testament Churches understand the Compassion of God who says, "GIVE TO HELP THE POOR." If we are reading the Gospel of Luke, in almost every chapter there is reference to accepting and helping the poor.

The young man is saddened, shocked, grieved, disappointed, and he goes away. In this story we do not know if he changed his mind later, but we do know there are always second chances in the Gospel writings. Mark's parable of the sower is of the seeds being sowed in differ kinds of soils. Some sow the word of God on stony soil, and some among the thorns, but the word that fell among the thorns, people hear the word of God, but "the cares of the world, the lure of wealth,

and the desire of other things, choke the word, and this type of soil yields nothing." Do not some of us have attachments that keep us from volunteering our time or giving money to help the poor?

II The Challenge to Us

What challenge is Jesus saying to us? What are our attachments? What attachments are keeping us from helping the poor? What attachments do we have that keep us from following Christ? Jesus could be saying to us this morning, what is one thing we lack?

Could it be lacking in a spirit of generosity, an attitude of giving and helping those in need? Our culture says to us, we have worked hard to place money in our bank accounts; they are our financial sources, so we can do with them what we like. We do not want the church or the government telling us we should give it to someone in need. However, if Jesus is to be the Lord of our lives, then he is to have some influence on what we give to help those in need. Many writers on Christian Stewardship suggest we have an 80-10-10 spending. With the lowering of interest, however, many are suggesting a 75-15-10 budget.

As I read and reflect on this story, I think the Holy Spirit is asking us to examine our ATTACHMENTS.

I have a 1999 Camry; am I too attached to it? Do I need to trade it in? Do I possess it or does it possess me in the money spent on maintenance and repair? When we had five children in the household, I attached myself to many long hours of working and neglecting the needs of my wife and children.

The Lord is saying, "Knock off some of those extra pounds and old man's gut." Could the Holy Spirit be saying, "Arnold, you are too attached large portions of food and eating too often? Do not listen to your mother who said, eat everything on your plate or do not throw away any food."

We live a modern culture with too many things to do. Here are some of the things I hear: Too much screen time on the computer or

TV; too many late movies on TV; too much time on Facebook; too little time in a daily devotion; too much alcohol; too few contacts to keep up with family; too much fear in losing my job; too much anger in my life. The list goes on.

What attachments are keeping us from being the best Christians that Christ is calling us to be in this phase of our lives?

Premature Cognitive Commitment: EG Fruit flies in a large jar and fish in a large aquarium. Are we willing to move outside the glass wall, or out the covered jar? Is God calling us to move outside of our comfort zones?

III The Promise or Good news in the Gospel Story

- The rich young ruler was obedient in keeping the Law, the Ten Commandments, but still he seemed to be lacking in something. Is their more to life than just "being a good boy or good girl?" Knowing something is lacking opens us to the Good News.
- The disciples asked: "Who then can be saved if it is hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom?" Jesus said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." It is possible to enter the heavenly kingdom, because it opens the gates for us by GRACE AND NOT OUR ABILITY TO KEEP THE LAW. BY GRACE WE ARE SAVED. THIS IS GOD'S DOING. Living and obeying the 10 commandments and all the moral laws we know will not get us into the kingdom. It is our accepting Jesus as Lord and building a trusting relationship with him in Corporate and Private Communion.
- Jesus said, "*We will receive a hundredfold...*" This verse has been used for the supporting the "prosperity gospel" that Christians are always to be rich. Just send in \$ 10.00 and we know God will put \$10,000 in your bank account. My interpretation is that God is in the business of multiplying our blessing. Malachi says that those who tithe to the Lord, and place tithes and offerings in the barns, then God will open the gates of heaven and flood you with

blessings. By being a committed follower of Christ, he will multiply your joy, increase your life with peace, and enhance your sense of self-worth by knowing you are loved by Christ.

He multiplies our family. My mom and Dad had 3 sons; all of us are married with grown children and grandchildren. Counting all the grandchildren, in laws, and now the first great grandchild on my brother's side, there are 43 of us from Lillian and Arnold Bush, Sr. It is nice to have a large family, but they are not like the friendships and church family who have loved Zoe and me. We have eaten together, played together, prayed in worship together, cried together. Followers of Christ in the congregation sometimes have stronger bonds than some blood relatives.

When financial stress occurs, there are some times when a surprise check comes in the mail, or an unexpected short term job opens up. What are some of the serendipitous actions of God in your life? These little blessing allow us to embrace life, embrace the beauty in His Creation; embrace the fine wine and food, embrace the person who encouraged us, etc. These are hundredfold blessings.

The following questions were selected for a Bible Study Group: However, if you are reading this sermon on the web page you may use these questions in a family setting or meal after reading Mark 10:17-31.

- Reflective Questions: What was the young man's assumption about how one gains the kingdom?
- Jesus quizzes the man on the commandants on a partial list (see EX 20) of the 10 commandments. How well might the man have obeyed the ones relating directly to God?
- What are the verbs in his command to the man in verse 21?

- On what basis is it possible to receive the kingdom, verse 27 ?

Application in the heart and mind:

- What experiences has helped you see the impossibility of “earning” the kingdom?
- In verses 29-30 how would you describe your experiences in receiving the gift of the kingdom? What has been part of your hundred fold?
- Are there some things Jesus may point to that would be difficult for you to “unstuff”? Or maybe prevent you from following him or receiving the kingdom?

Some Challenges:

I want freedom, freedom to consume more and more things and experiences; freedom to gain more “toys,” more expensive “things,” more places to see, more....HOWEVER, in our culture the more possessions with accumulate the more we are slaves to our possessions. You know the proverb, “Do my possessions possess me, or do I own my possessions?” Do I own my things, or do my things own me? Do I love what I do not have, or do I love what I have?

In some of the countries in southern Europe, governments are making some AUSTERE policies. We are reading or viewing some of the protests to this austerity. Are there any positive or negative experiences that have helped you to DOWNSIZE and then experience simplicity of time management and possessions?

Some Promises:

Can you share for little and big serendipitous experiences? Some blessing that multiply?