

## **For God All Things Are Possible** Mark 10:17-31

### **Too radical Jesus**

As you all know, this is the pledge month and a pastor is expected to preach about stewardship at least once this month, so you'll understand if your Pastor preaches about money and giving. Right? BTW, no pressure from the finance committee. Today's lectionary reading seems to be a perfect choice for this purpose because it talks about money and discipleship.

Even so, today's scripture is a difficult text to preach on because Jesus' teaching sounds too radical to follow. When the rich young man asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered, "go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." "Go, sell, give, come and follow me." It sounds very demanding. What was the rich young man's response? "When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions." (v. 22) If Jesus said the same thing to us, what would be our reaction? I bet our reaction would not be very different from this young man. If Jesus asked us to sell our beautiful sanctuary, give the money to the poor, come and follow him..., well, Warren Cole, David Dorsey and Lee Arnold would be extremely busy and of course, our New England Conference would not be happy about it. There would be a lot of controversy within the church.

We had a wonderful music concert in our yard to support our sibling church. Zion opened a free music school for our neighbors. Zion has poured out a lot of energy and time into this program. Serving our neighbors is a good thing, but we also know that this music program does not necessarily translate to church growth, even though we hope it will. Some people may wonder if we should continue to do it even if no music school participants come to the church. The tension between the ideal and the real is not easily resolved. We know we have to help the poor but we also have bills to pay and families to take care of. We need to support charity organizations but we also need to think of our family vacation in the summer or groceries we need to buy. We try to balance between the ideal and the real, but Jesus' radical teaching resists an easy resolution in a way that removes its pressure on all disciples relative to wealth. I don't have the answer on this matter of wealth but one thing that is clear is that discipleship is not only a spiritual matter but also a whole life matter, including money.

### **Discipleship Is A Journey**

Today's text is not primarily about wealth but about discipleship. The first words of today's text remind us that Jesus is still on his journey to the cross and his disciples are following him. Basically, discipleship is a journey, a journey following Jesus Christ. To follow Jesus, to join his journey, we first need to change our mode of living. I believe many of you like traveling. How do you prepare for a trip? You pack a bag. But you cannot bring everything with you. Even if you are particular about the bed you sleep in, you cannot bring your own bed on a trip. Depending on the purpose of your trip, you may have to leave unnecessary things behind and pack lightly.

One of the young adults in a group I led in a previous church, had walked Camino de Santiago, the way of St. James, a famous pilgrims' way in Spain. He told me that the first day on the trail is the most difficult for two reasons. First, people have to cross Mt. Pyrenees and second, people tend to bring more than what they need. Extra socks, laptop computer, pen, emergency food... so their backpacks are heavy. After the first day, people begin to think of

what they can take out of their backpacks to make them lighter. As he walked on the trail, he saw many discarded items like shoes, hats, fancy clothes. On the pilgrims' trail, he learned that the more he had, the more he was bound by his possessions. Why do people bring so much unnecessary stuff on their pilgrimage? Some might think, "oh just in case, I need extra shoes. Just in case, I need extra sunglasses." People tend to find some sense of security in their possessions. However, on the pilgrimage road, people realize that they have been bound by their possessions and the true way of freedom is to throw them out.

Discipleship is a journey following Jesus Christ. For this journey, we first need to be freed from things that bind us. That could be money. That could be our relationships, ego, pride..., whatever they may be, we first need to be freed from them to follow Jesus. According to today's scripture, Jesus looked at this sincere young man and loved him, so invited him to be his disciple. "go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." What Jesus asked him to do was not mere charity work. If so, this rich young man could have done it. But what Jesus wanted from him was not his wealth or possessions but his entire life. Jesus called him to join his journey toward eternal life in the kingdom of God.

Eternal life is a quality of life living under God's reign. In God's kingdom, what is more important than money is solidarity with other human beings, especially those who are suffering and marginalized. Feeling their pain as our own and sharing their burden itself is a way to eternal life. Of course, there are things that hinder us from having close relationships with others. For this rich young man, it was his possessions, so when he heard Jesus' words, "he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions." (v. 22) For some, it could be racial prejudice. For others, it could be the illusion of security. Whatever you are holding tightly to, Jesus is telling us that "you will have treasure in heaven" when you let them go. Think of what we need to let go in order to follow Jesus Christ.

### **Can we really do that?**

Of course, letting go of something we value is difficult. It seems almost impossible to do it. When this rich young man left, Jesus said to his disciples, "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?" The good news is that eternal life is God's free gift to his children. Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." We don't earn eternal life by doing good works but we receive it as a child. It's God's gift to his children. Those who taste the joy of eternal life have become free and freely share what they have with others.

As you all know, early on in the pandemic, we heard news from Rev. Luke Rhyee about the dire situation in Guatemala. People were quarantined and didn't have any grain to eat so they put white flags on their houses, asking for help. Asbury UMC and our church members shared what we had. I personally know Rev. Rhyee. He was a medical doctor in Korea and had his own hospital so he enjoyed an affluent life style. However, when he received God's calling, he became a missionary in Guatemala. Of course, he encountered struggles doing his ministry but he also experienced the joy of being with others and witnessing the presence of God in his ministry.

One of his ministries is feeding 600 kids twice a week. Twenty percent of children in that area only eat one meal per day. But can a missionary really provide meals for 600 kids twice

a week? When he voiced his concern about it, God reminded him of Jesus feeding the multitude with five loaves and two fish. He prayed and trusted that God would perform the same miracle and kept doing his ministry. As some of you know, his mission team continues share grain with 500 people a month. Rev. Rhyee may be an extraordinary example, but I believe that the God he trusts is the God we too believe in. For God all things are possible.

### **Join this journey of discipleship! to**

My sisters and brothers, I would like to invite you to join this joyful journey of discipleship. Letting go of what you value sounds scary and burdensome. Taking risks for others and sharing your time, energy and money may sound demanding. But my friends, there is joy you can only experience by taking this extraordinary journey.

Think about bungee jumping. [ppt] Jumping from a 141 foot high bridge is a fearful thing. However, every year, thousands of people visit Kawarau River Bridge in New Zealand to do bungee jumping. People seek the thrill and excitement they do not experience in their ordinary lives. The only reason that people can throw themselves into the air from the high bridge is their simple belief or confidence that the rope is not going to break. With this simple belief, they can jump from the edge of a high bridge into the air and enjoy the excitement and unique pleasure, of this risk-taking activity.

We are children of God. With faith in our heavenly father who cares for us, we can embark on our journey of discipleship. By letting go and sharing your possessions with others, “you will have treasure in heaven” and become faithful stewards of God in this world. So, think of the church, think of how Asbury serve others. Pray and faithfully prepare your pledge cards to bring next Sunday! The Spirit of Christ will lead our journey forward. Amen.