



With God, All Things are Possible – TouchPoint for October 6, 2021

Mark 10:17-31 (NRSV) The Rich Man

As he 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 humans 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.”

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

There is so much to talk about in this passage. So many ways to go. And so, I think I’ll go in the direction of all of them and turn this more into a ‘random thoughts’ touchpoint rather than a singular focus.

Random thought one: “Go sell all you have and give it to the poor.” This is one of those bible passages that proves that no one is truly a biblical literalist and fundamentalist. Just an observation.

Random thought two: Let’s talk about this word ‘eternal’ or ‘eternal life’. It’s not about the afterlife. We have so messed up this term from the original Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic.

Eternal life is not some future event or time. It is here and now. It is experienced here and now. It is life lived in those things that are eternal, love, grace, mercy and forgiveness. These are the things that last. These are the things that are eternal. So eternal life is life lived in these things.

A second thing about eternal life is that it is not static. Eternal life is not like a never-ending Spring or Summer. It is Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. Followed by another Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. It is life that is constantly being renewed, restored, born again. That’s what makes it eternal. It is constantly growing and changing.

It’s not one long same ol’, same ol’.

Richard Rohr put it well, when he wrote:

“Francis of Assisi knew that the finite manifests the infinite, and the physical is the doorway to the spiritual. If we can accept the foundational principal we call ‘incarnation’, then all we need is right here and right now—in this world. *This* is the way to *that*. Heaven includes earth and earth includes heaven. There are not sacred and profane things, places, and moments. There are only sacred and *desecrated* things, places and moments—and it is we alone who desecrate then by our lack of insight and reverence. It is one sacred universe, and we are all a part of it. In terms of a spiritual vision, we simply cannot get any better or simpler than that.”

Anyway, on to the passage itself and *random thought three*:

“*Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*”

That's a weird question isn't it? “What must I **do** to **inherit**?” Nothing...you inherit it...it's a gift...It's something that is given to you. You didn't do anything and you don't have to do anything. An inheritance is something that someone else worked for and then they leave it to you, give it to you.

It's an oxymoron posing as a question.

“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” The answer is nothing. But the nothing isn't nothing. It is rather something. It is the stumbling block. Because it isn't only that we must do nothing to inherit eternal life, it's that we must *become* nothing. That I think is the point of telling the rich man to go and sell all he has and give it to the poor. It is this idea that there is nothing we can claim for ourselves, to ourselves, by ourselves.

Just as it is impossible for a large animal to fit through a small opening, it is impossible for the wealthy to fit into the kingdom of God because you become wealthy by keeping, holding onto, possessing. That's what it means to be wealthy – you hold on to more! But the Kingdom of God is not a possession. It's not something we can hold on to. It holds on to us. It is bigger than us. Perhaps that is why Jesus says, “The Kingdom of Heaven is AT hand.” Rather than, “The Kingdom of Heaven is IN your hand.”

One cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, one cannot live in the Kingdom of God, one cannot experience eternal life with a closed hand, a clenching fist. It is all gift. And can only be received as such.

Eugen Peterson puts it well in his translation, “The Message”:

²² *The man's face clouded over. This was the last thing he expected to hear, and he walked off with a heavy heart. He was holding on tight to a lot of things, and not about to let go.*

You see, we no more possess the Kingdom of Heaven, than we do the sun, the moon, or the stars. We no more possess ‘eternal life’ than we do this thing called life. If we can't possess this life, we certainly can't possess eternal life.

Perhaps a better way to hear the question is to hear it as, “What must I do to **experience** eternal life?” I think that gets at the heart of Jesus' answer. And the answer is still the same.

“Hold on to nothing.”

And perhaps that's not a bad way to speak of the kingdom. Perhaps it would be best to say, the Kingdom of God is first and foremost... a kingdom of nothing. NOTHING. We enter with nothing; we hold on to

nothing; we possess nothing. All is a gift.

And that is EVERYTHING!!!

And maybe that's why my faith heroes these days are those who have been reduced to nothing, bottomed out as it were; those who have been reduced to nothing through addiction or illness or life circumstances, whether it be in their own personhood or in the lives of those they love. These are the very people Jesus refers to in the Sermon on the Mount:

“Blessed are the poor... those who mourn...the meek... the persecuted...”

This is where the kingdom is found. *This* is where it is experienced. *This* is what the kingdom of God looks like. These are the last who shall be first in the Kingdom of God...well, along with prostitutes and tax collectors. But I think you get the picture.

Random thought four: “With God all things are possible”

This is quite possibly the most bastardized quote in the Bible!!!

We take a statement about it being impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven, and turn it into a motivational poster or bumper sticker to inspire us to become rich or famous or powerful, to HOLD ON to our dreams, when the whole point of the passage is to LET GO of everything.

This is pure lunacy. The exact opposite of what Jesus is saying. It is ridiculous to take this statement as it appears in this passage, “*With God all things are possible*” and turn it into a saying that will help **ME** achieve SOMETHING, be SOMETHING, accomplish SOMETHING.

The SOMETHING is the root of the problem. The rich man wants to do SOMETHING more, be SOMETHING more, accomplish SOMETHING more.

He already is SOMETHING. He is rich. He is SOMEBODY by the world's standards. But he wants more.

And the solution to his problem, if we can use that language, is not MORE, it's not even LESS, it's NOTHING. NOTHING. NOTHING at all!!!

And let's face it, that is impossible for us. Impossible for us to become nothing on our own. Because that involves our death: death to self, possessions, free will; death to being the subject and the verb of our life and existence.

But let me clear about “something” else or should I say “nothing” else.

Deprivation is not the point of this passage. Neither is it the point of the kingdom. The point of the kingdom is in the caring and the sharing of all that we are and all that we have. The point is to live in the reality that all is a gift...and NOTHING is a possession. Or should I say, NOTHING is the only possession.

This passage strikes at the heart of our social presuppositions about wealth, prosperity, and individualism...and there is no escape. We live in a society that is built on an economic system. This is the paradigm, the system, the structure that is worshiped and glorified above all else. You can criticize many things in our society, but don't go after our economic system. It is the one thing we are in bondage to and

cannot free ourselves. Heck, last week's passage on divorce was a cakewalk compared to this passage.

Because above all, having SOMETHING in this society...means being SOMEBODY and, if we are honest about ourselves, at best we will walk away sad from this passage like the rich man, but most likely we will run away as fast as we can. And probably into the arms of Joel Osteen and the prosperity gospel who will tame the text and make it more to our liking.

We really are no different than the seagulls in Finding Nemo, flying around crying "MINE, MINE, MINE!!!"

So let me just confess to you and acknowledge straight up: I am in bondage to my possessions, my capitalistic, free enterprise culture. And I cannot free myself. I cannot empty myself to enter the kingdom of God. It is impossible for me.

Not so random thought five:

But here is the 'good news': if we won't empty ourselves to enter the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God will empty itself to enter us. Nowhere is this seen more vividly than on the cross, where Jesus empties himself, gives himself over completely, is stripped and naked.

Jesus, on the cross, does not hold on to himself but rather gives himself, empties himself, **dispossesses** himself, to enter into our world of pain and suffering and brokenness.

And how do we respond? We gather around the cross like roman soldiers and cast lots to see who will **possess** his clothes. And turn the cross into a profit making event for us because, after all, "*All things are possible with God.*" The contrast, the irony, the surrealness of it all is breathtaking: the world's ways and the kingdom's ways, captured in a single frame, one moment in time.

So, since we won't empty ourselves to enter the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God will empty itself to enter us.

Isn't that what happens in this meal? Judas refuses to enter the kingdom but rather betrays it. Peter refuses to enter the kingdom but rather denies it. And the rest – they would rather run away from and abandon the kingdom rather than enter it.

And what does Jesus do? He breaks himself down, gives himself over and enters their lives, their beings, their worlds, so they might be one.

And so, if we won't empty ourselves to enter the kingdom of God... the kingdom of God will empty itself to enter us.

You know, it's amazing what's possible for God.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Kyrie Eleison

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison, Kyrie Eleison
Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

In the Arms of God

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas)

Refrain: Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear. Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear. For the burden you carry will fade within God's care.

Come and rest in the arms of God.

1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace.

Refrain

2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains. God and God alone will be your souls true rest. Fall in the arms of God.

Refrain

3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care. God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God.

Refrain

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Choirs of Annunciation Byzantine Catholic church)

Benediction

A Celtic Blessing

(Margaret Rizza)

The guarding of the God of Life be on you, the guarding of loving Christ be on you, the guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you, to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life. The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Spirit be upon you.

