



TOUCH POINT

A Devine Buzz Kill? – Touchpoint for October 16th, 2024

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

¹⁷ 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?” ¹⁸ Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ 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.’ ” ²⁰ He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” ²¹ Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money^[a] to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” ²² When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³ 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!” ²⁴ And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is^[b] to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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.” ²⁶ They were greatly astounded and said to one another,^[c] “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

²⁸ Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” ²⁹ 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^[d] ³⁰ 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. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

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

Is God and Jesus just big buzz kills when it comes to us having stuff that makes us happy?
Does God choose for me to be deprived?

I mean, really, in the Bible's Old Testament, God told Abraham to get rid of his son.
In the new, Jesus tells the disciples to leave everything and follow him. This seems like a call to impulsive behavior to me! Jesus admonishes us to hate mother and father if we want to be in the kingdom.
Job? Well, geez, he lost everything in return for being a relatively decent human.

If that's not enough, in Luke 9:23, Jesus says, "Give up yourself!" He said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself... "

If I deny myself, what self of mine is left to follow Jesus?

Let's not skip ahead to the good parts as we often do with the uncomfortable. That's called spiritual bypassing. Resist the temptation to help God out with his reputation. Let's not plug our ears and sing "God is good all the time, all the time God is good" in an attempt to remind God his character is on the line.

In this story, a rich young ruler kneels before Jesus in reverence. Jesus tells him to give away all his wealth and follow him if he wants to live Zoe, the ultimate vitality of life.

We all hold freedom in high regard. It's an overarching theme in our country. But what kind of freedom are we talking about? In the 1700s, freedom from a tyrant was a thing that seems okay now. Freedom from a state religion. Now, many believe our founders picked the side of Christianity when they wrote the Constitution. Did they conspire a document of a particular faith, or were they inspired by their individual faith in forming the Constitution? There's no need to debate; I'm just wondering what freedom means to us and if we are free yet.

When the uproar about prayer being allowed in schools peaked, my children were in public school. Is that freedom? I told my kids not to pay attention to the adults fighting for kids to "be allowed" to pray in school. I told them nothing could stop them! You think it, and so it is. They understood. No one can take prayer away! Jesus said don't pray on the street corners pray in the closet. We seem to say make a scene! We are so proud when we get that person who says it was so nice to see you pray in public. Maybe that person should look at everybody else in the restaurant and say, "Shame on you, you unholy eaters!"

Those that are wealthy make the rules, those that make the rules have power, and those that have power try to hold onto it.

We certainly have wonderful freedoms in this country, and the freedom to worship as we please is a big one. But we are also free to develop addictions. We're free to smoke, eat preservatives, and use plastic. I'll stop there by just saying we are free to get sick. But we're only free to get healthy and healed, with a substantial financial cost. We fight for the rights of possession. We live in an environment in which the rich young ruler was also residing. "Those that are wealthy make the rules, those that make the rules have power, and those that have power try to hold onto it." Once in this equation it isn't easy to live a life of eternal freedom.

Jesus asks us to let go of everything we own. I know we've made it easier to digest this by reframing the demand as "He means we must hold people and possessions lightly." I'm not sure I've ever read those words from Jesus. Or how about, "If you donate, you will receive tenfold in return." (Disclaimer: it's not necessarily money. I've thrown a lot of empty scratchers away. Reframe this promise also!)

Perhaps Jesus is not saying to let go of everything we own, but of everything that owns us.

The rich young ruler owned much land, giving him much power and status. He wants more. He wants to live forever in happiness. Jesus doesn't answer on the young man's terms. He says to him, "You know the commandments: Don't murder, honor your parents, etc." The six commandments he quotes are about horizontal living. The young man says, "Whoo-hoo! I've kept all those," revealing his false self.

Jesus loves this guy, so he offers him the key to Zoe. It's vertical living. Happiness that cannot be bought or earned. Divest thyself! The young man walks away sad. Notice that Jesus, who has affection for the guy, does not negotiate with him or chase him down and says, "Never mind. I'm just kidding!" God is not co-dependent and will never rescue us from our unwillingness to be free.

But the offer is always available to us. Spirit is always giving itself to us. The spirit invites us to walk together.

Luke 12:33 "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a

treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroy. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Chayei Olam

Jesus knows the heart of the rich, the young, and the rulers.

Jesus loved the guy. Jesus was not trying to pull a fast one on him like Lucy pulling the football away from Charlie Brown. He wanted the young man to be truly free—in the now. That freedom lies in the heart, where our treasure is revealed.

Jesus does a very interesting thing with the Ten Commandments. He only recites six of them. Did he forget the others? I could relate to that! I don't think so. Jesus mentions the six commandments that are about being good. They offer us a reward that is filled with peaceful existence or at least keeps us out of jail. The young man went to the goal of being good enough, so Jesus went with him—for a while.

The young man refers to Jesus as good. Jesus says there is only one who is good. God alone is good. Jesus says if you want to be good and live happily, then keep the six commandments of a good citizen's life. If you want to know meaningful eternal living, Chayei Olam (Hi-YAY Oh-LAHM), then sell everything, give to the poor, and let's go live! Zoe. Eternal life.

According to Aramaic translators, what Jews heard in Jesus' words about eternal life was "Chayei Olam (Hi-YAY Oh-LAHM). While we often understand eternal life as life after death, this term meant a life focused on what is important and meaningful rather than focusing only on everyday concerns. A life of meaning rather than a fleeting life. (from En-Gedi resource center)

Jesus seems to be saying that knowing God intimately is living as if you were already in eternity—eternity lived now. The only way to eternal vitality is to walk intimately with God and learn to let go of all attachments. Jesus referred to this as "following me."

It appears Jesus knew the motivation of the young man's heart. He wanted life's fulfillment without releasing what owned him, what gave him his false identity.

"Do you know how much that car costs?" "No, how much?" "Everything."

My friend Jon Gean gave up a high-paying job as a banker so he wouldn't miss any more of his daughter's games and events. He was tired of serving self-serving customers. He traded in a fleeting life for living eternity now, walking with his daughters. He found other work. We were on a trip in his car, and he pointed to an incredibly beautiful high-end car. He said, "Henry, do you know how much that car costs?" I said, "No, how much?" Jon said, "Everything." He spoke from an experienced worldview.

Could that be what following Jesus or walking with Jesus is? Not focusing on the "stay out of trouble" commandments only but living the other four commandments as well? The ones that are about walking with the divine in profound intimacy. Chayei Olam. It's a shifting of our treasure from one account to another—the treasure in the heart.

This is a challenging invitation from Jesus. He invited others to walk with him and experience the only one who is good, to gradually let fall away all that encumbers us, and to draw close to that which has drawn close to us. To live Chayei Olahm.

Amen

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

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

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

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.