

Mark 10:17-31 Just One More Thing  
Rev. Carol Hassell, October 14, 2018

I'll begin with a brief word of context for the gospel passage this morning. We are reading from the witness of Mark, the gospel writer who begins right off with the summary of his entire gospel...."The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." He starts right in with John the Baptist proclaiming a baptism of repentance and Jesus coming from Nazareth to John in the Jordan river to be baptized. Next the Holy Spirit, who descended upon Jesus at his baptism, leads Jesus out alone into the wilderness for a long time where he was tempted by Satan, the accuser/adversary. Mark doesn't say it, but the other Gospel writers do: Jesus spent his time in the wilderness alone—his thoughts, his hungers, his fears, denying his body, emptying himself as he searched his heart and mind discerning direction in quiet prayer and in scripture, facing his demons before he entered the villages and regions of the land to bring good news to a people hoping and waiting for God. He exorcises unclean spirits, he heals people, he preaches, he calls the disciples, he answers questions about religious rituals, the law, the Sabbath, he tells parables, stills a storm, faces opposition and contempt, commissions the 12, feeds thousands twice, walks on water, blesses the faith of a gentile woman, warns of the yeast of the Pharisees, foretells his death and resurrection 2x, experiences transfiguration on the mountaintop, and tells the disciples that to be great they must be servants of all and have a heart for children (the least), then he blesses the children and the innocence of their faith. And here we begin the reading for today...

Mark 10:17-31 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 your 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 the 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, brother 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.”

My husband Bill and I returned home late Friday night from a two week trip to a dark, still (except for our cats who were delighted to see us again), quiet home. Yesterday, before our power was restored, I went to the Charlotte Spirituality Center to work on this message, to get it written down. Bill went to Starbucks for wifi and power to do some work that he needed to get done. We have been seeking places to connect with power, to be empowered, this weekend.....which is a prominent theme, in my mind of this reading: Seeking a source of power, a power that can only originate from God, be given by God, and be experienced in God. Power is one of the major themes of the scriptures and the overarch message of Jesus in the gospels. Even in the words of the Old Testament prophets about Jesus they speak of his power and empowerment: a new kind of messiah, savior, king who will empower his people. I might also say it this way...Jesus came to empower people. The prophets speak of a humble servant who will fulfill the hopes of God's people and empower them to live with faith and courage. A sustaining message of hope that sounds great and wonderful, but the price is high and stakes are high too.

Jesus' power source? Well, his heavenly Father...God. Think about the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. He made it through that fierce period of discernment by faith, entrusting himself to his Father, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, and by the guiding wisdom of the Holy Scriptures. He withstood the hungers of the body, mind, and soul and professed his trust in God...he would not use his own power to preempt God in any way. Think about Jesus' ministry and the people and groups he encountered. They were in some way either: subject to power (powerless: the sick, the possessed, women, children, the poor, the oppressed, blind, lame, hungry, the insecure), wielding and controlling power (powerful: political and religious

authorities, men, the wealthy, the healthy, the arrogant), OR had been empowered by the good news and by faith/trust in Jesus (Mary sitting and listening at Jesus's feet. Lazarus raised and unbound. Zaccheus set free from greed and extortion. He was blessed, reconciled and claimed back into his community. The graced woman who anointed Jesus' feet and was pronounced blessed. The scapegoat woman who was not stoned to death but forgiven and sent on her way. The men walked away with solemn resignation. They were powerless people for whom Jesus had compassion and he acted to empower them, to restore them and their loved ones to wholeness, to life and life in community. Aren't these some of our most desired and valued gifts? Jesus' power originated and radiated from a combination of humility before God and others, truth in all things, wisdom from scripture and prayer, and love and grace from his heart. He set people free. He empowered people. He did not encumber people with indebtedness to him...joy in response to him, yes! Gratitude in response to him, yes! Compassion for Jesus in response, yes! Humility and compassion for others, yes! But not a typical power dynamic...at least I don't think Jesus was creating that kind of relationship with them, nor with us...he came to set us free. And that's what he instructed the rich young man about...freedom.

So, what about the rich young man and Jesus? Such a good person. Yet, still seeking something. By all appearances he has it all...wealth, man, righteous according to the law, a good man who is empowered by all social and religious measures. A man who has been able to meet the rules and standards and requirements of his faith, government and community...still searching for something, still in debt. He was living in debt to the law and captive to the riches which he likely worked hard to accrue. He had achieved success...albeit success empty of that which gives life and satisfies the soul. So, Jesus said to him...Put these things, your wealth and your righteousness, into perspective and live for God and for the well being of others and you will be set free.....this freedom will be your salvation. This is how Jesus offered to empower the rich young man. Sound familiar? These are the two greatest commands, according to Jesus...to Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus taught what he lived.

He taught and lived by an unfailing faith in God—not independent of God and others. He trusted in God even when he despaired in Gethsemane. He believed that God would redeem the course of events. He tells the disciples in today's reading, "All things are possible with God!"; He taught and lived by truth and grace. John's prologue tells us he was full of it!! He judged by no standard other than truth and grace. He wore no mask and could see behind all masks. In every

way he desired redemption and freedom for everyone. Whether by truth or by grace or BOTH. He came to set us free. He came to empower us for life in the kingdom of God.

Set us free from? I think we all know: the same things the rich young man was captive to and from whatever holds us captive. Set us free for? Well, I found it humorous in this passage that Peter, ever the bold one and ever the one who sincerely wants to follow Jesus but has a hard time doing it! steps forward. One time when Peter did that he got soaking wet! But not this time. Jesus' words to the rich young man must have stirred up some insecurity, some questions in Peter's mind. We dropped it all to follow you...what do your incisive words to him mean for us, if anything? Jesus' reply: Those who leave it all (put it all in perspective), entrust self and life to God, and prioritize the saving magnitude of the good news for self and for others will be rewarded. When you begin that new life....you will have entered God's kingdom on earth and into the pathway and flow of eternal life. Servants of the good news (the last) will enter into eternal life. Servants of the good news will be empowered with a faith that will stand through the ages...that aching emptiness down deep in your soul will have found its home in the love God and through love for others. Love is empowering freedom; more costly than anything we can buy with money. Jesus says, Subject everything you have to love, do all things in service to love. Mind boggling! Something very hard to wrap your head around. Enough to make you want to walk away from Jesus, just like the young rich man: to keep on nursing the aching soul along, keeping the desire for the eternal at bay, sacrificing our own souls for the comfort that always falls short, the status that always hungers for more, and the control that is an illusion.

So much of what Jesus says in this passage strikes a chord.....more so a loud, resounding gong. It is that nagging, annoying voice that we always hold captive because it will cost us to listen to it...that voice crying out the truth that exposes our places of vulnerability and powerlessness. The voice that says open your eyes, wake up...you are not free. Today we are living in times of great need and fierce, corrupt power dynamics...just as the people of Jesus' day were: Dynamics that continue to create exploitation of people, animals, environment that touch every aspect of our lives and strip us of our humanity, dignity, and that deny our God given value and worth. Dynamics that create negative dependence upon powers and authorities and instead of bringing us together in interdependence create divisiveness and contentious independence.

Jesus was always opening people's eyes to power. See it for what it is-in yourself and in others. Be able to, learn to distinguish power from empowerment. Ground

your discernment of power in love of God, love for self, and love for others. Jesus made his choice in the wilderness. The rich young man made his choice too. We, too, make choices about power every day. Every day. And those choices, all choices, cost us something—whether they are small losses or whether we lose it all. We choose.

The cost was too high for the rich young man. And for you? For me? Following Jesus is ours to discern. And like Jesus in the wilderness...the very power of God, the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, is with us and will guide us towards God and towards love if we will follow. It is more costly to walk away from Jesus and the good news than to believe it and walk with him.

May the Spirit of God awaken us to truth that we can see clearly and empower us with grace that we may choose to follow Jesus, responding to God, to self, to others, and to all things, all of life with love. AMEN. And may God bless this witness.