



SUNDAY SERMON

Things vs. Jesus. A Reprise

Holy One, Fount of all knowledge illumine our minds, free our imaginations and kindle our hearts. Amen.

The text makes sure we hear "Jesus, looking at him, loved him..." Before Jesus gets to the really hard bits, the story takes off here. With Jesus looking and loving on a rich person. Jesus' love might not seem particularly noteworthy but it definitely is here. In the Gospel of Mark this is the only time Jesus is explicitly loves someone. The other two times that the word love is used in Mark is when Jesus is quoting Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Two other well known gushy sentimental texts.

Before Jesus upends the world of a rich person, Jesus looks on them with love. In fact, one could rightly argue that the reason Jesus upends the world of rich people is because he loves them. Hopefully this brings some measure of joy this morning - my fellow rich people, Jesus is upending our world because he loves us!

Love is Jesus' launchpad this morning and from it he delivers a line that has caused millennia of Christians' angst, inspired countless hours of theological jiu jitsu and thankfully has motivated more than one saint to give away all that was owned in service to the Kingdom of God. When one thinks of it, the instruction to sell all of one's possessions and give the money to the poor makes most sense because it is motivated from the love of God incarnate.

With a heart of love and laser focus attention Jesus drops a truth so undesirable to human ears that it instantly unnerved everyone within hearing distance of his voice. 2000 years later and these words still have the power to clear a room and leave scores of people uncomfortable and dejected. Yes the rich man goes away disappointed, but Peter too is also thrown off by Jesus' words. The weight of Jesus words don't just speak to status, they also speak to desire. Jesus calls out unspoken desires not usually addressed in polite company. That's where we are this morning - in the Wild West of desire and ego because that's where Jesus has lead us.

The rich man's question jumps out as one of sincere, radical non-transformation. How many of you have prayed for something akin to radical non-transformation? - "You know God, I have this square foot area right over there - God I'm giving you complete control of this area. Go to town! I'm open." What a joke. It is a joke that we all play on ourselves, but we can't play it on God and that's part of what's going on in this exchange.

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DATE
Pentecost 21
Sunday, Oct. 14, 2018

PREACHER
The Rev. Amy Molina-Moore

VERSE
Mark 10:17-31

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Throughout Jesus' exchange with the rich man we learn that the real question on this man's heart is ultimately not about the next life as he asks, but about this life. Embedded in his question is the real question: Can I serve God faithfully if I sacrifice nothing and maintain the status quo. It's a question you and I seem to throw to God with some regularity. God can I do what I want, when I want, how I want and still be following your holy ways? And frankly folks, the days we even ask the question are the good days. There are days when this question isn't even on our radar. We just assume that God is as comfortable with the status quo as we are.

Can I serve God faithfully if I sacrifice nothing and maintain the status quo?

It comes as no surprise to us that the answer is no. Sacrifice, challenging the status quo, struggle, discomfort, all of this is par for the course when you follow the way of Jesus. Radical Transformation is what Jesus is offering, and yet so many of us are approaching our faith like the rich man, asking God to bless us with radical non-transformation.

I don't know about all of you, but I for one am desperate for some radical transformation in my own life and in the world around me.

This week the world received some really distressing news. The report from the UN on Climate Change minces no words. Humanity cannot keep this pace of consumption going without dire consequences for creation. 2000 years ago Jesus recognized that humans have a scary attachment to possessions. Over the course of a few millennia that attachment has blossomed into a full blown addiction that threatens the air we breathe, the water we drink, even the ground under our feet.

In light of our destructive addiction to possessing things, Jesus' words "to sell what you own and give the money to the poor" assume a level of profound potency equal in magnitude to the problem at hand. . . Regardless of economic status, across the board, we humans are obsessed with things - making things, selling things, acquiring things, having things, hoarding things, buying more things, protecting our things controlling who has access to things.

I throw myself very much in this boat friends. About 10 years ago I spent a summer in Guatemala. I had packed like I was going on tour with Beyoncé - shoes for all occasions and the outfits to match. When I landed in Guatemala I discovered to my horror that none of my bags had been on the plane with me. For the first 5 days of the trip I made do with two shirts, a pair of pants and a second hand dress I had bought in the local town. I found that these articles of clothing were all that I needed. When my baggage finally did arrive a week later I was embarrassed with all the unnecessary and excessive things I had packed. For the following nine weeks I literally had to carry around all my excess baggage. It was not fun. In a literal way I learned how our stuff can slow us down. The last week of my summer trip I led a week long mission trip. The first 6 days we painted a school, played with adorable school children, visited a coffee growing cooperative, traveled the beautiful green countryside. On the 7th day we shopped for souvenirs... Guess which day was people's favorite day. People came back from their afternoon of shopping absolutely bursting with excitement in a way I hadn't witnessed earlier in the trip. I had a front row seat to observe what happens when we people acquire things and folks it's not pretty. The beauty of humanity and God's creation became secondary to the beauty of consumerism.

I don't know about you folks, but more than I'd like to admit "things" have held a place of prominence in my life in unhealthy ways. I have made decisions in service to things rather than in service to God. When does that end? When do we say enough, possessions, you don't own

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me. Could it be when we don't own them? The uncomfortable call from Jesus is not just for the rich man, it is for me... It is for you ... in the truest sense of the word for. Jesus wants to tell you again this morning that you are not what you own and this life is about so much more than just being another rat on the wheel of consumerism. Rather than being shame-inducing words - we can claim Jesus' words this morning as a call for our liberation. We can Free ourselves from an unhealthy addiction to stuff fostered the day we started watching Saturday morning cartoons as kids. This need not be theory, we can tangibly free ourselves from mindless acquiring of things. The day may come when we can sell all our things and give the money to the poor but until then; for our souls and for our planet we need to be conscientious consumers who buy, budget and pledge with creation and God's mission in the world in mind. Together I think we all might be able to transform humanity's devotion to things, and replace it with devotion to the holy ways of God. Amen