

Priorities

Mark 10:17-31

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Whether we are rich or poor, well off or not so well off, this story has something to say to all of us. Usually this gospel is a stewardship sermon, after all it has all the parts; the faithful man, Jesus – the very Son of God, the question of possessions and money, and finally a perfect teaching moment. But this Gospel reading has at least one other emphasis that we can examine today- that is priorities, what and how do we place things in our lives. Jesus asks all would be disciples to examine their heart, who do you put all your trust in, what do you put before nation, before occupation, before family, what is number one on your list? Jesus in love, please note, addresses the question of our heart's priorities. In this one man's story we see ourselves asking and being asked the same things. Are we able to put God first and follow Christ before everything, everything else?

First let's look at the man. If you look in most Bibles or even commentaries you will notice they entitle this section the rich young man, or even the rich young ruler. St. Luke calls him a certain ruler, perhaps alluding to the fact that he has wealth. But really all it says is by the end that he turns away because he has many possessions and he can't bear to part with them. Looking around this church today I would say we all have possessions, some more than we know what to do with.

Back when Shellene and I were moving here, we had to go through the storage of our stuff. We moved things out of our basement boxes and things that we hadn't used or opened or even remembered that we had in years, but we couldn't get rid of it, because it is our stuff. How many of you don't have stuff at home, boxes and bags in the backs of closets, in attics, in basements, things you haven't looked at for a while or used for a few years now. And this is not to mention all the stuff we do have out and use often or even just occasionally. We all have stuff!

All that is not bad. Jesus never says that having the possession is ultimately bad, it is just the priorities we give them in our life that makes it bad or good. The man had come to God wanting more stuff. He might have a fine home, nice furniture, he has the newest all terrain, 4 hoof donkeys. He has stuff. But Jesus has just finished talking about how the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to even the littlest child that people were bringing to him, eternal life belongs to such as these. The man perhaps standing nearby does a quick inventory, he had beds and lamps, pots and pans, servants and a house, but he wasn't so sure if he possessed eternal life. How can those children have it and he doesn't? So he quickly ran up and knelt before Jesus asking how

can he inherit this eternal life? So Jesus already knowing what is in the man's heart asks him about his priorities, what is his life about, and he reminds him of 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...

But by now the man already knows he has done these things, and says as much, assuring Jesus he has done them since a child. I have been faithful, I have done everything I was told to do. I have worshipped, not killed, not stolen anything, honored my parents, not defrauded or lied. Now do I get that one thing I still need, Eternal life. Can't I get the big payoff now for being good? We have been good right? We haven't killed out of hatred and malice. We have stolen anything that deserved a prison sentence. We are upright, good people. We of course deserve God's gift. We figure if you are goof enough then you get rewarded and so he figures the same thing. Yes, Jesus I have done all these things ever since a child.

Then Jesus dives right into the man's heart, identifying his greatest handicap of faith – his love for stuff. Sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me. Jesus knows the man is stuck. His priority in life, making sure he has everything restricts him from doing what Jesus asks of him. He can't be happy with what he has, because he knows he might be missing something, something someone else might get and he think he deserves it. So he wants that to add to his stuff, but he can't give everything away to receive what he wants. That just can't happen, because he is to committed to all that stuff first.

All of us can understand the predicament the man is in. He wants what Jesus is offering, but he just isn't sure if he can give everything that is asked of him to get it. Sometimes we really want something to have, to buy, and possess, but at the same time we have worked hard to save up the money, to spend that much on this one item, might be overwhelming, just too much. We end up wondering if it is worth it, do you take that step, do you make the leap? Sometimes these are agonizing moments in our lives.

Do you remember when they had the big wishbooks that came out around this time every year? I do, Montgomery Wards, and Sears would have those Christmas Wishbooks - where as kids my sister and me would just sit flipping through page after page of all the toys and other stuff that kids never really need but wish for anyway, marking the book up. We made lists for Santa, wanting this, and that, and don't forget this and that. Every page had something I wanted. I am sure my parents hated those books, because all it did is make us want more stuff. One time, after much pestering for this expensive computer game console, my parents told us we could get that one gift if we were willing to not receive anything else – nothing. A whole bunch of gifts or one thing...one thing or a whole bunch of gifts...whole bunch of gifts or one thing?!? We went for the

whole bunch of gifts. The one thing just didn't have that great of a pull to take us away from all the other potential things we could get.

This is exactly where this man was at. He asks for something and Christ tells him to possess it he must give up all his possessions. What a weird answer. What a difficult answer. What if Christ came to you and told you to give everything away and follow? Most of us would ask for another option. We would be like the man who fell over the edge of a cliff, as he went down over the 250 foot drop he grasped hold of a thin little branch sticking out of the face of the cliff. "Help, Help!", he shouted. "Is there anyone up there", he cried. Then suddenly he heard a booming voice saying, "This is the Lord, let go of the branch and I will save you!" The man looked down at the drop below and after a few minutes of thought said, "Is there anyone else up there?" It is just too much to put our entire heart, trust and life in the hands of someone else. We want to control, direct, have, possess.

Jesus revealed to the man the true nature of his heart. His things, his commitment to stuff, his priorities blocked the greater gift from ever being received because he couldn't part with all those other wants. Jesus had challenged the man to give up his trust and desire in these things, to relinquish his hold on what he held, to give up his control to take up God's security, the promise of life everlasting.

Jesus challenges us to look into our own hearts and see what is it that we fully trust in. Is it God. Are we able to let go of that branch on the cliff side and trust in God. Are we able to give up all our gotta have its' and trust that God will provide? We say it so often that God loves. That God gives us peace. That God provides a place in the eternal kingdom for us that I wonder if we really know the great gift that we are being offered. Do we believe that it could be that simple – To trust God before everything else, to put our heart and mind and life in God's hands. Do we – Are we able to do this?

Priorities in life? Where are yours. God grants us a gift that will never end. A promise of a place in the everlasting kingdom as a child of the eternal family, marked by the grace of Christ now and forever. And yet we continue to set our priorities of the here and now first before this great gift. We have this or that to do – you understand. We can't do this or that, you understand. We can't give this or be responsible for that – you understand. Priorities in life. Come and follow Jesus calls to the man, and to us. Are we able to give all that we are and all that we have and follow? May you turn to God and give your self fully into the grace that has no limits. May you realize the freedom of knowing Christ and the joy that is promised to each of us, if we but trust and follow Christ. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.