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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church  
21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 23/Year B  
October 14, 2018  
Text: Mark 10: 17-31

Today's gospel is one that is familiar to most of us. It is the story of the rich young ruler. His story appears in not one but in three gospels with varying nuances in each. In Luke's Gospel he is a ruler. In Matthew's Gospel, he is a young man. And we call him rich because Luke, Matthew, and Mark all tell us that he had a lot of possessions. Whether he was young or old, worked hard for his money or inherited it, was just an average Joe or someone with a lot of clout, it is odd that we don't know his name. Scriptures often did not name women but to be a man without a name is a bit strange. Could it be so that we the readers can readily see ourselves in this passage?

In any case, a man runs up to Jesus and asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds with the commandments: do no murder, no adultery, no stealing, no lying, and no cheating. Oh and, honor your father and mother too. But pointing out these commandments is not enough for the man who says he has honored all those things since he was a little boy. And we are told that Jesus looked at him with love and said: "*Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.*" That was certainly not what the man had expected to hear. Mark tells the man was shocked. His face fell. Stunned, all he could do was to walk away in silence. He had a lot he would have to give up but he just could not do it. To be told to sell one's possessions is a hard and painful command. Who in their right mind would walk away from everything they owned?

There are a few common reactions to this story. The first is to think that Jesus is asking us each personally, to sell everything we have. There have been in the treasure trove of biographies of the saints only a few who mastered Jesus' command or came close to it at least. St. Francis of Assisi, whose life we remembered last Sunday at our pet blessing was one. Francis was born into wealth only to hear the voice of Jesus tell him to renounce everything he owned. He gave up his possessions in the middle of the street; even taking off his clothes right then and there, some stories tell. There

others like St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Katherine Drexel, and St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta. All who were born into wealth or at least had very comfortable lives.

The problem with this interpretation we notice is that Jesus did not expect others to sell or give away their possessions. He hung around some wealthy folks and some of them, women, funded his ministry. When Zacchaeus offered to give away half of his money, Jesus never said, 'That's not enough. Give it all away.'

Another reaction to this passage is one of: "Well, Jesus couldn't really be talking to me. That's too much. It's ridiculous." We want something more palatable than hearing Jesus tell us to give all that we have away. And so we ignore it. None of us came into church wrapped only in our bed sheets and no one walked here. There are umpteen cars in the parking lot. And we may tune all this out as the preacher gives his or her spiel to kick off the annual stewardship campaign... Hmmmmm. Hold on to that thought, please.

Then there are those who say this text is not about how much money you have. Instead, we might want to remember that there is nothing any of us can do to earn our way into heaven. We cannot win or buy our salvation. We are all dependent on God's grace and mercy to save us and to bring us into eternal life. It doesn't matter if we are rich or poor-we are all in need. No argument there. Jesus says the same: "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." This is worth remembering too.

There is still another way to interpret this story. Look for a moment at how the man approached Jesus. Mark says the man ran to Jesus-not walked, but ran to him. And not only did he run but he knelt at Jesus' feet. The only people who knelt at Jesus' feet in Mark's Gospel were those in need of healing! The leper knelt before Jesus asking to be healed. Jairus, on behalf of his dying daughter, knelt before Jesus. The woman who endured twelve years of hemorrhaging, knelt before Jesus. And so did the Syrophenician woman who knelt before Jesus on behalf of her daughter. And now, the rich young ruler, who has followed the commandments and possesses many things kneels before Jesus. Something within his spirit, his heart, acknowledges that despite his fancy robes, house, land, and wealth something was missing in his life. He knows, like us, that money and

possessions cannot buy happiness or solve every problem. So he comes to Jesus in need of healing.

Jesus looked at the man and loved him. *Sell what you own. Give the money to the poor. Then come, follow me. Let go. Live even deeper your life, your faith in God. Live deeper, fuller, richer and not just by keeping the laws prescribed, by keeping a checklist of do's and don'ts.* But the man had so much “stuff” that he did not, could not, let go. Whether he had a change of heart later and did what Jesus asked, we will never know.

Jesus might be looking at us in the same way, with love, and perceiving the ache in our hearts, our searching too. Like the rich man, we sometimes can't accept what's being given to us unless we let go of what we already have. There are people, especially those who are recovering from addiction who have said that at some point in order to feel good about themselves, to turn their lives over; that they had to let go of friends they had, in order to find friends that they needed. Sometimes in order to be healed, to be set free, we need to let go. The other day I shared with the bible study group that the freest I ever felt was when I sought entrance into the Daughters of Charity. 1.) I could not enter with debt and thank God I was able to get rid of my debt. And 2.) When I actually entered, like the other sisters, all my “possessions” were in two suitcases. And I was actually free! I could extend myself to others without the burden of stuff. Of course, over the years I have amassed more junk, more stuff. Will I ever be *that* free again? Perhaps not. But I have learned that it is really okay to give, to share abundantly, because God's blessings abound. Not with being paid back in mind but because we are loved. Blessings come back when we are willing to give, to share, our possessions and ourselves with others.

It seems that Jesus has demanded a lot of us lately. To many people this passage sounds like scary stuff. But know this: God cares for you and wants you to experience healed and full heart, the freedom of life now, and the abundance of life now and that is to come.

That said, there are questions for us in light of today's Gospel especially as we begin the financial portion of our Stewardship Campaign.

Do we want to be made whole? Do we possess things or do they possess us? How serious are we about building relationships with ourselves and with others? These are questions to ask of ourselves not only as

individuals but as a congregation. Please discern and pray how you will express your monetary giving.

Some days it seems like it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of needle than to do all of what Jesus demands of us. It almost seems impossible for us. But for God, all things are possible. Thanks be to God!

Amen.

\*based on "*Curing our Heartsickness*," a commentary by Prof. David Lose, 2015