

“Let the favor of the Lord be upon us;
and prosper the work of our hands.” AMEN!

“An author named Tony Myles asked one of
his teenage sons to sit down so that
he could talk to him.

“I’m going to say something to you
that I don’t want you to deflect,” Tony said.

“I’d like you to just receive this from
my heart to yours.”

The son nodded and prepared himself
to receive whatever came next.

For the next two minutes,
Tony offered as many words of
encouragement and affirmation as he could.

He explained what he thought of him as a son
and as an emerging man.

Tony told the son how thankful he was
that the teenager was trustworthy enough
to bear responsibilities and be diligent in
his school duties.

Tony told his son of the way he'd been
watching him meet new people and
show respect to others.

He told his son about the way he recognized him
as a real and inspiring person,
the kind of friend that he would have
wanted to have had
in his own teenage years.

Reflecting for a moment,
Tony told of that conversation being one
where he "literally watched his son's
inner world enlarge with every word
he uttered." (Pause)

Words have that sort of power, don't they?

They can break someone apart or build them up.

They can encourage or discourage.

Hurt or heal.

Words can express condemnation or forgiveness,
trust or suspicion.

Hate or Love. (Pause)

Today, we read the ways that
the Bible is “living and active.”

“The Word of God is living and active,”
the text from Hebrews tells us.

Which means that through its words,
we find tremendous power that can
be used to give voice.

And when the Bible’s words are taken into context,
read through carefully, and looked at
through the lens of Jesus,
we find that the living voice of God
speaks to us,

challenges us, comforts us,
convicts us, forgives us,
kill us, and then resurrects us.

And it is good to note that this doesn’t only
happen to the collective “us” but to all humanity.

“Let the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of God;
for God spoke and it came to be;
God commanded and it (that is, the world)
stood firm. (Psalm 33:8-9)

All the proof we require, to affirm that

the word of God is active and living is
today's gospel lesson.

On a day, when Jesus really *needed* to
take on more followers, we instead
find him turning one away.

Well, he didn't really turn the man away.

He chose to do that on his own.

Yet, in the recording of this event,
we might be left wondering if we might
do the same thing?

That is, would we depart Jesus grieving,
for we, too, have many possessions?

Before we go there let's uncover some specifics.

The text begins by telling us
“a man ran up to Jesus,
knelt before him” and then he
asked a question.

We don't know it, yet, but later we find out
he was quite wealthy.

We also may not know that running

was not a “high status” behavior
in that culture.

A wealthy/high status person didn’t
have to run anywhere.

No, they were ones that made other people
run to and for them.

But this one runs up to Jesus in a way
that revealed, by example,
that he knew Jesus was above him.

So, he wasn’t trying to trick Jesus,
he genuinely came out of respect and
with a desire to learn.

He, also, came with a knowledge of
following God’s commandments.

But he came asking the wrong question.

Now, I say that without judgment because
I too have come to Jesus asking
the wrong questions.

His was “What do I have to do to inherit eternal life?”

Even though it was the wrong question,

Jesus dialogues with him.

The same way Jesus might dialogue with us
when we ask the wrong questions.

“Tell me what you know,” or even better,
“tell me what you are doing,” Jesus inquired.

The man answered Jesus by telling him
he did all the things required, but notice
that Jesus did not list all the commandments.

Most notably the first one:
You shall have no other gods before me. (Pause)

Have you heard it said that
there’s no such thing as an atheist?

An atheist states there is no god,
but the truth of the matter is
we all have gods.

Be they money, possessions, comfort, fame...
every human being bows down to something.

And this word of God,
the one that is active and living,
speaks to our hearts today because
it convicts every single one of us.

Jesus' conversation with the rich man
puts our heart in the crosshairs of the Holy Spirit.
(Pause)

Now, as I speak about this text as a pastor,
I notice that it is one of those Bible lessons that
I'd like to manage or mitigate.

You know what I mean!

Put a little spin on it. :-)

Some of those time honored strategies like,
the man didn't really keep the commandments
like he said he did, so that business
about giving up his possessions was
just a way that Jesus called his bluff.

Or giving up everything was just a command
for this one rich person, Jesus doesn't make
that claim on us or anyone else.

Though Peter admits that he,
and the other disciples, did leave
everything to follow Jesus.

Or this command only applies to the ultra-rich.
The 1% (I think I've preached

that one in the past!) :-)

We can all think of someone richer than we are,
so this lesson is for them, not us.

Or some preachers, even perform a brilliant
act of contortion and say Jesus is really
saying give it away so that what returns
is greater in value.

That's the prosperity gospel,
at its finest or shall I say, most shameful
spin of this record of Jesus. (Pause)

My point? It is easy to discount or dismiss
this lesson because what else are
we gonna do with it?!? :-)

The first thing we will do is try not to spin it
to be not about us.

It is about us.

No matter how many zeros we have
in the bank account.

We can allow the conviction to enter
into our hearts and we can let
the text do the hard work that

Jesus meant it to do.

Even though, it seems extreme, Jesus
was promoting a great vision, here.

He still promotes the vision through
the living active word.

His point was not just about
divesting ourselves from possession,
lightening our load,
but to give things away to the poor.

If the tide comes in, then all boats will rise. (Pause)

There are some who, like the disciples,
who have given up everything to follow Jesus,
but most of us have not gone
to such extremes.

Why?

Be honest with yourself and with God.

Why can't we sell all that we own and
give the money to the poor?

(trust, safety, doubt, need it to help others, etc...)
They are all good and honest answers.

All those good and honest answers begin to
set the stage for us to potentially
get to the place of Jesus' great vision...
little by little.

The conversation and discernment
leads us to begin (or continue) to put the things
we have into perspective.

And what we should remember is that
we are told the man went away shocked
and grieving, but we don't know
what happened next or later with him.

We aren't told if the encounter with Jesus
set in motion an ability to come to know
the freedom Jesus offered.

I like to think that if he could be positively affected
by the life changing, active and living,
Word of God, then I can be, too.

Not because it shows that I can follow rules,
or earn eternal life,
but so that I can see the ways to
freedom and renewed life, right now.

(Pause)

The difficult teaching here, might remind us
that Jesus saw something the man
couldn't see.

If a child is blindly running toward a cliff
they don't know about,
then it's no time for polite language.

Might it be that was what Jesus was doing?

Throwing out the polite language
to save this person, to save us,
from running off a cliff? (Pause)

The only way I can think of changing
the path of our world, is to change
my own behavior.

So, let this text convict you, as it convicts me,
let it do the hard work because it will
set us free and it will renew life.

Let it lead us to follow Jesus by selling our stuff
and giving the money to the poor.

We stay connected in following
this Jesus who helps us everyday.

AMEN!