

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

Mark 10:17-31

Hebrews 4:12-16

“Satisfy us by your steadfast love in the morning;
so shall we rejoice and
be glad all our days.” AMEN!

Here we are... on week three of Jesus’
4 part sermon series on the truth
about discipleship.

To recap we began with Jesus’
shocking warning to us and the disciples
to not be stumbling blocks for the little
ones who believe in Jesus.

“For it’d be better to have a millstone tied
around the neck and thrown into the sea.”

Then we encountered last week’s lesson
where Jesus’ gave tough teaching on
the subject of divorce and adultery.

His message to the Pharisees
trying to trick him
came just before today’s lesson
where so much is happening
in these verses.

We have the encounter and dialogue
between Jesus and a rich man.

There is the listing of commandments that
the man had obeyed since youth and
an expression of love for the man
as Jesus looked at him and
gave a difficult prognosis:

sell everything, give the proceeds to the poor
and come, follow me, Jesus said.

If you are thinking, this isn't challenging,
pastor, I am not rich.

Then think again because there is
not a loophole for us to wiggle out of here.

This remedy is not only a challenge to Jeff Bezos
but a critique on us, as well.

For Jesus, here, offered the answer
to the man's question about inheriting
eternal life in a way that sent him
away grieving.

I wonder, "Couldn't Jesus had
been more gentle?"

Where was his pastoral care about
"meeting him where he was?"

Mark's gospel doesn't answer
those questions directly but there are
clues for us to gather.

The first one is subtle.

Mark wanted us to be aware that Jesus
was setting out on a journey when
this man ran up to him.

The journey was the final leg to Jerusalem.

We know what will happen there.

Jesus knew what was going to happen there, too
and had prepared his disciples with predictions.

This final journey to Jerusalem had been
surrounded by much planning and
preparation and prayer.

So the day arrived and now as Jesus
and disciples ready themselves,
a wealthy man ran up to ask,
“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

There is a tinge of selfishness in the question.

“What must ‘I’ do?”

Isn’t it just like us rich folk to want to know
what we have to do to get what we want?

We love to have that control.

Take notice of the word “inherit.”

It means something, too.

In order to receive an inheritance one must
come from an affluent family and be in
good relationship with the benefactor,

but we have also heard of the stories
where someone received a large inheritance
from an unknown relative.

The long lost aunt who was a millionaire
left her entire fortune to the nephew
she never met.

He didn’t do anything to receive it.

So, the fact that Mark communicated how
the man asked,

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

We recognize the way the man already
had great wealth and wanted to be in the
control of gaining eternal life, too.

He even “schmoozes” Jesus a little
by calling him “Good teacher” and
to kneel before him in respect.

Was he a wolf in sheep’s clothing?

If so, he is not the only one.(Pause)

There are some more “firsts” for us to notice
in today’s gospel reading.

This is the first time Jesus made such
a demand upon someone in Mark.

The demand to sell everything and give
the money to the poor.

It is also the only time in Mark where
we are explicitly told that
“Jesus looked upon someone and
loved them.”

This truth reminds me that it was
not an arbitrary command or a

statement from Jesus meant
to frustrate the wealthy man.

“Jesus looking at him, loved him.”
He wanted to help him.

And gave him the truth
he needed to hear.

We can hear it, too, if we keep listening. (Pause)

How would I respond to
such a command from Jesus?

How would you?

It is hard to think of a gospel passage
with more disconnect between the teaching
from Jesus and the norms of
today’s Christianity.

This passage is a difficult one to sit with
but it’s not meant to make us feel guilty;
nor for us to turn and go away grieving.

It is meant to be like those finger traps you get
that squeeze you the more you try to
pull away and out of them.

Jesus grips our hand as we try to pull away
and rebel all the while...
still loving us. (Pause)

So, instead of freaking out, or ignoring this lesson,
or going away in despair from what Jesus taught.

Let us consider how this story
requires us to think about our role and goals
in the community we live in.

Jesus did not wish to destroy
the rich man's fragile faith nor is
Jesus very interested in hearing
about our excuses for our greed.

He simply gave the difficult truth
because of His unwavering love and
that directs us to our response. (Pause)

Now, this is the part of the sermon where
I remind myself that I am not
speaking for Jesus.

To be careful that it's not me and Jesus
talking to you all.

This is the part where I recognize that
I am a wayfarer, like you on

the journey with Jesus.

And notice that sometimes I take
positive steps in discipleship and
on other times, especially when
lessons like this come up on the schedule,
I feel like a fraud. (Pause)

I will tell you the truth,
I am not likely to leave worship and
go sell everything and give the money
to the poor.

If you are preparing to do that, that's great!

Probably, no one will.

I wonder if any of Mark's original
readers ever did.

Would it really matter? (Pause)

So, what are we supposed to
take away from this event?

Should we turn, like the rich man did
and go away grieving because we
hold many possessions?

No, let's not do that.

Instead of that, we should focus on
Jesus' look of love and continue on
the difficult journey of discipleship with Jesus.

Jesus wanted this person to join
Him on the journey but the man
stopped asking questions and broke
away from Jesus in despair. (Pause)

That is what we must take away from this lesson.

Don't leave Jesus.

We are rich people but we also
recognize that wealth does not give us
total control.

That belongs to God.

Total control belongs to God so there
will be times when we give with lavish
generosity and there will be
times when we feel like frauds
because we are human.

Either way, it is Jesus' look of love
in which we rely.

And we stay connected to Christ. (Pause)

Another thing that stirs in us when we
encounter these kinds of difficult texts is
the vision that it may open to us as
a community of faith.

What is it that we can let go of, sell and give away?

With Jesus, it is not just about walking away
from the things that control us,
like money, property, possessions, the like...

it is about using them to empower others.

Remember, Jesus did not have this conversation
with the rich man in order to trick him or
make him grovel.

Instead it was an opportunity for Jesus
to help him imagine a new way of living.

Today's message comes to
St. Stephen in the same way.

How does what Jesus said lead us
to a new way forward, to a life
less enslaved to wealth and in
greater solidarity with those

who are poor?

How does Jesus' look of love lead us
to eternal life - right here and right now?

Here we are, Jesus, what a calling
you have given to us.

AMEN!