

MEDITATION 38

Mark 4: 23-25

And Jesus said: if you have ears to hear, then hear!" ²⁴ He then said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and it will be added to you. ²⁵ For to those who have, more will be given, and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."

Here's a good example of how reading part of a statement rather than the full statement can get you into misunderstanding. Verse 25 on its own seems harsh and terribly unfair: "For those who have, more will be given, and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away." Shouldn't it be the other way around, namely, that those who have nothing should get something, while those who have something should be challenged to share and give to those who have less? But what are we actually talking about here?

The earlier verses all point to the importance of hearing and paying attention. It is a call to focus, and focus not only with your mind, but with your heart. Verse 24 seems to make obvious common sense: "The measure you give will be the measure you get, and it will be added to you." In other words, the more you put into something, and the more you apply yourself and invest yourself and what you have, the more you'll get in return. Isn't this capitalism 101 and good business advice? It is also applicable to relationships and many other things besides.

But then, the good common-sense advice about how life works in verse 24 is followed immediately by verse 25 which seems so unfair and contradictory. Or is it? Unless, following the logic of capitalism and investment, it means that the more things like money or time you invest in something, the more you will get in return, while having little or nothing invested will get you little or nothing in return, and the little you have invested may evaporate altogether!

And yet, what are we actually talking about here? What is Jesus interested in having us hear and pay attention to? Is it money? Or is it something else? Well, let's think about love and love that is actualized in relationships. Jesus is building the network of relationships he is calling the kingdom of God. It's an alternative way of being to that of the world. In this kingdom way of relating, the more you invest in love in relation the more you will grow, strengthen and deepen the relationship. But investing little in a relationship will lead to not only getting little back in the relationship but losing it altogether. It's just the way it is.

So then, having nothing is not about money or possessions. Having nothing means having little in terms of relationships that are rooted in love. We can have all kinds of people in our lives. We need people to serve us, to do business with, to interact with, but what about

relationships of care, service, giving and receiving? What about grace and gratitude where we recognize the giving and receiving as gift rather than mere transaction?

Jesus is trying to inspire a whole other way of being beginning with those closest to him. How deeply can such inspiration take root in a world such as ours? What about in our lives?

How much do you put into your relationships? And how is what you put into them connected to how much you receive from them? And how true is it that when we put little into some relationships, they fade altogether?

Or is it also that sometimes we feel we are putting a lot into a relationship with little in return? Is that because the other person is not giving much back? Relationships do require reciprocity to be fulfilling. And yet, sometimes, we feel we must put a lot into a relationship and the getting back has to come from our faith that we are doing good despite what someone else can't give back to us. Maybe they are sick or lost or struggling for any number of reasons.

Sometimes we give to someone in need because we have received from them or someone else when we were in need. Sometimes we feel a certain responsibility with certain relationships like family. There are various obligations that compel us in our giving of ourselves and what we have. At the same time, we need to evaluate on a regular basis where we invest of ourselves and where perhaps its time to withdraw.

How may Jesus' parabolic words speak into your situation and your relationships at this time of your life?

PRAYER: Meet us where we are, O God... Some of us have known what it's like to give and give and give and yet receive little in return... After much disappointment and hurt too, we have learned to let it go, move away or cut off. Or maybe this is currently now a relationship in our lives where it may have been different at one time but is now imbalanced one way...

Or maybe some of us are feeling like we're missing a deep and trusted relationship, O God. There are enough people in our lives, but our giving and receiving feels more like utility than gift given and received in love, gratitude and appreciation...

Help us, O God... Help us discern... Give us courage to make good choices even when others don't accept or understand them... Give us grace to be patient with people who need time to rise up to expectations and to giving as much as receiving...

Grant us the gift, O God, of having those few people in our lives where there is deep giving and receiving that overflows in blessing the world around us... And thank you if such people are in our lives, whether they be human, non-human or the earth we walk on and the air we breathe

in 24/7 in all the spaces we inhabit and travel upon... Thank you, O God, In Jesus' name...
Amen.