**Riches or God** Mk 10: 17-31 October 13, 2024

* You’ve all heard the story about the child who got his hand stuck in a vase and after breaking the vase to free his hand they realized the only reason his hand was stuck was because he had his hand fisted holding onto a coin that was inside the vase.
* I think this story might present a parallel for some of us when it comes to letting go of certain things.
* This may be especially true when we are asked to make choices.
* Nevertheless, life is about making choices.
* In today’s gospel reading, the rich young man was asked to make a choice to follow Jesus, and, as we heard from the story, he chose otherwise
* Many people believe this to be a very hard teachings of the New Testament.
* I believe that it is a teaching that is often misunderstood.
* The gospel of Luke has this same story but with a little more detail. This rich young man was actually a *ruler* (Lk 18:18-23).

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* I believe this story about the rich young ruler represents three things that many people wish for, and often spend their entire lives seeking.

1. He was rich, and therefore could buy anything he wanted.
2. He was young and presumably therefore had good health.
3. He was a ruler which meant that he had power and authority.

* He had it all, in terms of worldly material and understanding. Yet, it wasn’t enough.
* He knew there was still something missing. He was a good example of the ultimate longing and need that we all have deep inside us.
* As we get older, we may be more open to discovering this ultimate longing, but in general, I believe there are two things that can block us:

1. We are so busy and preoccupied attempting to gain riches or power in our lives, that we fail to realize that all of our material possessions, as well as power and authority,

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ultimately come from God.

1. When we do acquire material possessions, we again fail to realize that they come from God, and we are unable to let go of them and put God first.

* In the case of the rich young ruler, he was obviously in the second category. He could not let go of his great wealth and power, and put God first.
* Many people misunderstand this teaching, thinking that Jesus was condemning the wealth and riches that the rich young ruler had.
* Jesus was not condemning the fact that he was rich. He **was** condemning the fact that the young man had put his wealth ahead of God.
* The rich young ruler knew there was something more, and was longing to have it. How sad that, when it was actually offered, he didn’t recognize it and chose his worldly fortune instead.
* God is not against wealth. There are many places in the Bible where individuals had tremendous wealth and

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were continually blessed by God. King Hezekiah and King Solomon are good examples. Once King Hezekiah repented of his pride he acquired great riches and honour. King Solomon had riches beyond our imagination, yet he was continually blessed by God. ***King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth.*** (I Kings 10:23)

* King Solomon however, put God first before everything else, at least at the beginning when God blessed him so mightily. (*Won’t talk about his final days*)
* In today’s gospel story, the disciples were amazed at Jesus’ request that the young man give up his riches, and even more amazed when he said how hard it was for a rich man to enter the kingdom.
* This was because the Jewish understanding was that having riches meant being blessed by God and being in His favour.
* In Jewish understanding of the time, the rich young ruler’s salvation would already have been assured, simply

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because he was rich.

* So on one hand we have the understanding that wealth is a blessing from God. On the other hand, Jesus is telling the rich young ruler that he must get rid of his wealth in order to enter the kingdom of God.
* What this all boils down to is that our wealth, and it doesn’t matter what the amount is, can be either a blessing from God, or an obsession that is blocking our relationship with God.
* Jesus said to the rich young ruler, “***You know the commandments”***, and then proceeded to name some of them.
* I find it interesting that the five commandments that Jesus named were the ones that the rich young ruler could stand right up and say, “***O these, I have kept since I was a boy***.”
* He was filled with pride in being able to say how good he was at keeping these commandments. He was like those in the church today who think they can earn their salvation. “***What must I do?***”
* The commandments that Jesus did **not**

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mention however, really pinpoint the problem. Jesus didn’t name them but he

surely demonstrated them by what he asked the young man to do. “***You shall have no other gods before me***. ***You shall have no idols.*** **You shall not covet**.”

* When asked to put God ahead of his wealth, the rich young ruler could not. “***You shall have no other gods before me” -*** the rich young ruler had made his wealth his god. “***You shall have no idols” -*** the rich young ruler had made his wealth his idol. “***You shall not covet”*** - the rich young ruler could not let go of his wealth and power, therefore he was coveting it.
* Jesus knew that the only way this young man would ever be able to satisfy the deep longing in his soul would be to put God first in his life. Jesus knew how far off track this young man was, and yet, the first thing that the Scriptures tell us that Jesus did was look at the young man and love him.
* He loved him **so much**, that He told him

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the truth. But the young man went away sad.

* Quite a strange paradox - materially he

had everything, yet he knew that there was something more and he longed for it, but he was so attached to his material possessions that he could not choose it, nor could he receive it.

* He went away sad - I suspect Jesus was also sad; however, He let him go. He did not offer to negotiate, *nor did He go after him*. The young man was free to choose - God will always respect our free will in choosing.
* Jesus calls each one of us to make a choice also. I don’t think he is asking us to dispose of all our wealth and material possessions like he did the rich young ruler -- that is, unless we have made our wealth or our possessions our god. In that case, he would be asking us probably the same question as he asked the rich young ruler. Jesus asks us to always put God first.
* We put God first when we realize and acknowledge that absolutely everything

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we have comes from him.

* When we are able to give thanks to God for blessing us with whatever we have, our wealth, our possessions, our families, our very lives – that is when we are putting God first.
* And of course, one important way of giving thanks and knowing that we have put God first, (*a way to measure just how much we have put God first*), is how we respond in giving back to God. When we fail to respond to God and put Him first, we are actually denying ourselves of His blessing - whatever that blessing might be. The Bible says that we are putting ourselves under a curse.
* God promises us that when we put him first in our lives he **will** bless us.
* There is only one place in the whole Bible where God invites us to test him. In the book of Malachi, which is the last book of the Old Testament, we read these words:
* 8***“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.” But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. 9You are***

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***under a curse‑‑the whole nation of you‑‑because you are robbing me.***

* 10***Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”*** *(Malachi 3:8-10)*
* The surprising thing is that God does not need our money, in spite of what some TV evangelists might have told you, nor does he even want our money when we give it grudgingly.
* What God wants is **us** - all of us. He wants us to put Him first in our lives, above everything else. When we do that, what we then give back to God will be with a thankful heart because we will know that everything we have is His anyway.
* Like his promise says, I believe God wants to bless us mightily. But that must begin with having a right relationship with Him.

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* His first blessing is that of Joy in our lives.
* C.S. Lewis said: “***So many people settle for what he called a ‘shadow happiness’ and never experience true joy and abiding peace.”***
* He describes joy as: “***an unsatisfied desire for God which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction***” (*C.S. Lewis - Surprised by Joy*)
* In other words to be seeking God and His presence in our lives leads to the greatest joy in our lives.
* I am so pleased that a few weeks back each person here stood and claimed Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.
* That acknowledgment is a significant beginning of a life of God’s blessing

**Two questions**

1. Are we like the little child with our fist tightly grasped around our coins, or are we willing to let go so that God can have his way with us?
2. Will we continue to nurture our relationship with Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, or will we too go away sad?

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* We alone can make the choice. Had the little child let go of the coin, he could have had it and the antique vase. How much are we losing by hanging on?