

28 Ord, Sunday B
Wisdom 7:7-11; Hebrews 4:12-13; Mark 10:17-30
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Do you remember the “yuppies”? Yuppie was a term coined in the 1980s. It described a “young, upwardly mobile (urban) professional.” Yuppies are the children of the Baby Boomers.

The parents of Baby Boomers were members of the so-called “Greatest Generation.” They struggled through the Great Depression. They served as soldiers or riveters in World War II. They experienced hard times, worked hard, and became obsessed with economic security. They had been taught to build secure, practical careers. They were not concerned so much with happiness or work satisfaction. Their priority was to provide a financially secure, stable life for their families.

The children of the “Greatest Generation” are known as the “Baby Boomer Generation” because of the large increase in children after the War. Baby Boomers were brought up to envision a prosperous and stable career for themselves. They were taught that they could be anything they aspired to be as long as they were willing to put in years of hard work to make it happen.

The success of Baby Boomers and decades of economic prosperity led the Boomers to encourage their children, like themselves, to be all that they could be. The children of the Baby Boomers were the Yuppies. They were wildly optimistic. But they were not satisfied to achieve the American Dream as their parents were. Instead, they wanted to live their own personal dream. From their parents, they regarded themselves as “special.” Their mantra was expressed by the mythologist, Joseph Campbell: “Follow your bliss.” The Yuppie goal was “happiness” and “self-fulfillment.” According to studies, this generation (generally, of course) had unrealistic expectations and a strong resistance to accepting negative feedback. Unless they stop thinking that they are special or entitled, they will be unhappy.

In today’s gospel, we may have encountered the first “yuppie.” The man who ran up to Jesus (sometimes referred to as “young” although the scripture

doesn't indicate this) is concerned about happiness and fulfillment: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" This man is full of enthusiasm at the sight of Jesus, and appears to be on the verge of becoming a disciple.

In reply, Jesus cites some of the commandments in a nontraditional order. The commandments he cites all have to do with transgressions against others: murder, adultery, thievery, false witness, honoring of parents. And Jesus adds a commandment that is not among the traditional ten: "You shall not defraud!" Does Jesus perhaps know something about how this man has achieved his great wealth?

The man claims he has observed these commandments from his youth. In an especially poignant moment, the evangelist says Jesus looked at the man and "loved him." Was this a hopeful love that the man might become a disciple? Or was it a disappointed love because Jesus knew the man's heart? In any case, Jesus challenges him to abandon his wealth, give it to the poor, and follow him.

And in another emotional moment in the gospel, we are told the man's face fell, and he went away sad for he had many possessions.

Why would Jesus demand so much of this man? After all, Jesus had many wealthy friends and followers. There were Lazarus and his sisters. The gospels tell us that Jesus and his apostles were supported by pious women as they travelled from village to village. Nicodemus, a secret follower of Jesus, was a man of means since he sat on the Sanhedrin. Joseph of Arimathea was wealthy enough to have his own tomb.

Clearly the issue was *what one does with wealth*. Jesus taught that wealth is potentially the source of considerable danger for one's relationship with God. The worldview of the Bible was that the world's goods exist in a finite, fixed amount. If one hoarded wealth, you were depriving others of their fair share. The pious Jew was obligated to share his bounty with the less fortunate. Contrast this with the naïve belief of our affluent world that the amount of this world's goods are infinite. Have we yet come to see that clean air, clean water, fertile earth, minerals, energy sources, ice caps in the Arctic, and so on are in limited supply? They are finite. And yet we continue to deplete and abuse them.

The hyperbole Jesus used regarding a camel passing through the eye of a needle should be taken at face value. It means what it says. The judgment is not on

wealthy persons per se, but on the entanglements and obsessions that wealth can create. The man in the gospel was sad because his wealth had come to control him, rather than he managing his wealth. Greed is idolatry. Greed is a root vice. It breeds other vices. Whether wealth is evil or not depends on the use we put it to. The use of one's wealth in the service of God is a manifestation of one's love of God. The New Testament offers two important norms for the use of one's resources: One is the alleviation of human need, the other is the establishment of equity among all humankind.

Pope Francis has been a true prophet in this regard.

“Certainly every country needs economic growth and the creation of wealth, and the extension of these to each citizen, without exclusion. And this is necessary. But the creation of this wealth must always be at the service of the common good, and not only for the benefit of a few.”

Perhaps we need to examine our own attitudes toward money. I don't think we want to go away sad from the invitation of Jesus to follow him.