

Sermon - The thing you lack - Mark 10:17-31

“You lack one thing.”

I fear I lack much more than one thing, do you?

But what does this fellow lack, exactly? Of course, there's all kinds of irony here, because in the end, by material standards, by society's standards, by the measures of the world that have determined the criteria for abundance and blessing, he lacks nothing — nothing at all.

Does he lack an ability to care for the poor? Does he lack a consciousness of another's scarcity? Does he lack the ability to appreciate his abundance?

The story is frustratingly ambiguous and rather ambivalent which make for an interpretive temptation to reduce this text to a message that is far too simplistic, but theologically easy.

Let's just take Jesus literally. We *do* have too much. We need to give it away. We have not given out of our abundance. So we are eager to stand behind Jesus' injunctions against rich people. We readily chide those who hoard their wealth. We are quick to say to another, “With all you have? Good luck getting through the eye of a needle, friend.” Yet all the while, we secretly wish we had wealth to hoard. Or at least more than we have. And then we have succeeded in wiggling out of Jesus' charge. “I don't have money like this guy, so Jesus isn't talking to me.” And all of a sudden we've managed to escape Jesus' words to us, “you lack one thing.”

I spent last weekend running a whole gamut of emotions. I presided at a funeral of a faithful member on Thursday, presided over a beautiful marriage on Saturday, and experienced wonderful love at my installation. You might have said the entire weekend was ones where I experienced the real means of grace and love. Death, love, hope of what is to come.

It is a rare thing in life to feel so cared for, to sense the gift of attention and abundance by even those with whom you are the closest let alone people you met just days before. I was deeply

touched by the ways in which the community of believers at Zion so clearly and demonstratively knew God's abundant grace.

It is so easy for us to view the concept of lack in only material things, material categories, as if lack is only determined by an absence of wealth. This is not to say that this text is not about money, about wealth, and what you do with it. There is a clear message that wealth does something to us and that something is usually not viewed as having a positive effect. Riches seem to steer our glance inward, to stoke our individuality, to set our sights on our own abundance with nary a thought about securing someone else's.

Beyond the fact that the rich man has too much, there's another part to the rich man's problem. He knows only to ask about safeguarding *his* eternal life without concern for that of others. "What must *I* do," he asks. He is unable to see that the potential to experience eternal life might very well lie outside of his own doing. He is incapable of recognizing that abundance may very well be found outside of the wealth and riches he has stored up. He insists that what he has procured is irrelevant to who he is or who he thinks he wants to be.

Where do you locate your abundance? Where does your abundance come from? Do you trust only yourself to make it possible? Lack takes on many forms in our life. This story asks us to ponder how we might complete the sentence, "I lack

.....There is one thing you lack. And you need to figure that out.

But the issue of lack takes on a particular meaning in this story — it is that which prevents you from a full expression of faith. What is the one thing that is at the core of who you are, what keeps you from being the follower, the disciple, the believer, the witness God wants and needs you to be? This is a terribly hard question to answer, I know.

And so we ask it among the community of the faithful, hearing the truth from another so that perhaps we can then tell

the truth to ourselves, with the sure hope that the places and spaces of lack might be filled once again.