

The Inheritance is Yours

Psalm 90:12-17 and Mark 10:17-31 | Twenty-First Sunday After Pentecost | October 13, 2024 | Deacon Nina Joygaard , preaching

When I was a child, I was fascinated with my mother's jewelry box.

I would go into her bedroom and play with this amazing treasure! It had tiny drawers for watches and bracelets, fancy glass painted doors with necklace and ring storage. It had beautiful hand-painted details and a swivel-base so you could spin it around – which I found to be very fancy. I was surprisingly responsible when I played with this jewelry box. I would open the doors and re-close them when I was done, captivated by the magnetic



closing mechanism. But, I don't remember ever wearing the jewelry or taking it out to play with. It was the "treasure-**chest**" that I was truly interested in.

Probably around the age of 5-6, I approached my mom and asked her an important question.

"Mom, can I have your jewelry box when you die?"

As one of 4 daughters I wasn't necessarily a shoe-in. In my young child's mind, I think I anticipated a lot of competition for this amazing possession.

Now, I don't remember her exact response to my earnest question, but I do remember she graciously explained that I shouldn't really ask questions like that. It's not polite or maybe not appropriate or considerate. For some reason, this **jewelry box** was stuck in my mind as I studied our story for today.

Sermon Transcript

Now, there are layers upon layers to unpack in this Bible passage.

The teaching about wealth and giving all possessions to the poor, the infamous camel through the eye of the needle image, treasures and shock and grief, impossibilities commanded by Jesus and the intense emotional reactions from **both** the rich man **AND** the disciples – who are perplexed and astounded. Our story of this man who approaches Jesus is incredibly complex. But as I studied our scripture story for today – I just kept chewing on the first couple of verses... I kept thinking about this man who comes to Jesus and his unusual question:

“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

I’m puzzled by this question. It is really quite odd. Is it ever appropriate to ask how to **inherit** something? Was that maybe more socially acceptable during Jesus’ time, than it is now? Isn’t inheriting about the kindness and generosity of the giver – not what **the recipient did** to earn the inheritance received?

The Reverend Dr. David Lose challenges us to consider the opening of this story.

“I wonder ... if Jesus is suggesting that something is amiss with the question itself. Once you imagine that eternal life is something **you inherit or earn by being good**, perhaps, you’ve lost.”¹

¹ David Lose, Commentary on Mark 10:17-31: Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost. Workingpreacher.org. Accessed 10/1/24.

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In fact, when the wealthy man calls Jesus good – Jesus seems to bristle a bit at that descriptor. He says, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.” (v.18)

According to Jesus’ response – “No one is good – that is, really and truly good – apart from God. Which means both that no one is ‘**good enough**’ to inherit eternal life and that entering the kingdom is not [even] about ‘**being good**’ in the first place.”²

It's easy to point fingers at this man from centuries ago – wanting to know the rules, so he can accomplish the “goal” of making it into heaven. We can accuse him of being short-sighted or naïve or too caught up in the world and not invested enough in the kingdom. But let’s consider the reality – “wealth was considered a sign of blessing in the first century”³ – and **I’d argue** is still often thought of that way today. Doesn’t our wealth create the flawed belief that we are somehow self-made and self-sufficient? That we need neither God nor each other at the end of the day? Don’t we have an innate sense of cause-and-effect being **THE** guiding principle of our lives, **even** in our faith? That we do right in order to get something in return?

This man likely had worked his way into his riches by either literally “inheriting” or working devotedly to succeed financially. “Working for it” has been a way of life for him – even in faith -- by diligently following **all** of the commandments. Neither this man or us – whether wealthy or struggling financially can ‘work’ for God’s

² Lose.

³ Lose.

Sermon Transcript

favor. We can't earn our inheritance. We are never going to win God's approval based on what we do or don't do.

The man even explains that he's kept **all the commandments** that Jesus listed out – ever since he was a youth. And it is not enough. At this point in the story, something **fascinating** happens – and it's likely not what you think.

Here is where Jesus looks at the man and loves him.

Seriously – this is Jesus' response.

“Jesus, looking at him, loved him.”

Do you know how hard it was to find artwork of Jesus looking lovingly at this man? But, it is right there in the scripture. It doesn't say Jesus looked judgmentally at the man I found **lots** of versions of that in artwork. Nor does it say Jesus looked mad or disappointed – but there are many options of that image out there too. Why is it so hard for us to hear or even notice that Jesus LOVED him?

This man. Is the “**only person** in the **entire Gospel of Mark** singled out as being **loved** by Jesus.”⁴ The ONLY PERSON Jesus is described as loving – was this guy.

⁴ Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, Commentary on Mark 10:17-31: Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost. Workingpreacher.org. Accessed 10/1/24.

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Jesus “does not treat him as insincere or mock him as self-righteous, but ... **loves him.**”⁵ We are missing the point of the entire story if we don’t take seriously Jesus’ “absolute and unconditional love for this man.”⁶

This is amazing to me. Like a parent lovingly responding to the foolish questions of their beloved child. Jesus’ response is to truly see him, and to love him – as he is.

Of course, Jesus doesn’t end there. He goes on to say, “You lack one thing.” And then enters of litany of things the man should do. Neither the rich man nor the disciples take Jesus’ teaching about wealth very well. Peter goes so far as to get defensive and try to prove how much he and the other disciples have given up to follow Jesus.

Whether you are a rich person, or a poor disciple following Jesus – the call to discipleship is difficult. For those of us, striving to follow Jesus today – to live our lives in faith – we are called to something incredible **AND** difficult.

To follow Jesus is to let go & just give away all the ways of the world.

To trust in God to do the impossible, when we know we lack the will or ability.

And to know deep, deep in our hearts that **Jesus sees us and loves us.** Loves us with such a big and generous love that we receive what we could never ever earn.

⁵ Lose.

⁶ Lose.



Sermon Transcript

And without deserving it, the inheritance is ours.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.