

October 13, 2024
Church of All Nations
Mark 10:35-45

We know today's story from the gospel as the Rich Young Ruler - which is a composite title. Only Matthew says he was young, only Luke says he was a ruler, but all 3 say he was rich. It is basic human nature to compare yourself to someone in a somewhat better situation than yourself. So very few people would identify as rich, because when we think of a person we call rich it would be someone just that bit better off than we are.

What is your basic attitude to wealth and rich people - jealous, resentful, disparaging, dismissive?

It is the story of a person who did not choose to follow Jesus. A failed call story! Amazing! Not all good news stories.

This section of Mark is about discipleship, it contains the passion predictions, teaching about leaving all behind, children are mentioned several times and favoured in Jesus teaching - but when we ask what topics preoccupy the disciples it is stuff like squabbling about who is the greatest, who will sit on favoured seats,

Our protagonist is deferential, respectful, bows down. Jesus takes him at face value; seems to be impressed by his initial earnestness. In fact this is the only time Jesus said to look at someone and love them.

Do you think the man is sincere? Certainly comes across as earnest - He seems to be what Christian churches were interested in attracting a few decades ago - a "seeker" they were called. Someone not yet committed but open, searching for faith and the gospel. Some churches were labelling themselves deliberately as "seeker friendly church". Anyway, in contrast to the pharisees of last week who approached Jesus to trap him and corner him on the topic of divorce he bows down, and declares he has obeyed all commandments. Possibly he was looking for validation - look, I have done all these good things! But we need not be too cynical, the clue being that Jesus loved him.

Wealth in Jesus time was generally taken as a sign of blessing, I think we would have more ambivalent attitudes to wealth, how it was created, and what influence it can buy. It would have been quite shocking for the hearers of Jesus to hear him reverse that and say actually it is a hinderance to true blessing and even salvation. The man is grieved, sad, but disciples are shocked, amazed.

Nothing you can do to earn salvation but everything you can do - sell stuff and come and follow - That sequence of verbs The sequence of verbs go, sell, give, come follow

Not just sell stuff but other part is discipleship - come and follow me. Did he really know what he was giving up in walking away?

Cannot/won't do it so how earnest was he really? Did he want a cost free salvation, cheap grace?

He was offered a place in the pantheon of heroes we call apostles. Those who were daily in the company of Jesus. This guy came so close, yet so far from being one. We may well have known his name and called churches after him. St Andrew's St Matthew, next week we welcome people from Mark the 'Evangelist and we could have added St ... that rich guy who did not join us...who declined the invitation to "Come and follow me." He had an invitation to the greatest party on earth.

which this man can't do because he's enmeshed in his pre-exiting life, he can't extricate himself, he has other priorities.

Jesus is saying we are not required to give up wealth - but you will need to reassess what wealth is and who it belongs to - Jesus isn't calling for a *sacrifice*. He's calling for an *economy*.

If it's just "me," the command "sell everything" leaves me impoverished and then I am going to start depending on charity and the good will of those around me. But if the command "sell everything" is directed at "we," then I'm not impoverished, I've entered an economy of sharing and gifts.

I have mentioned a number of times in sermons that we too often get seduced into a mentality of "scarcity" when in fact the gospel is predicated upon a mentality of "abundance". There is more than enough to go around. There doesn't need to be hungry people in the world as the planet is more than capable of producing enough food for all.

When we think in terms of "me" we're bullied by scarcity. What's going to happen when I have nothing? By contrast, when we think in terms of "we" we find ourselves surrounded by abundance. That's Jesus' message to Peter: In the kingdom you're not going to be left destitute. You're going to receive a hundredfold "houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands."

is placed upon the *community*. It makes no sense for one person to sell everything to find himself or herself homeless and knocking on doors for a meal. An isolated act of sacrifice doesn't create the economy of the kingdom. To be sure, that sacrifice would be heroic, but it doesn't create the kingdom. Yes, there are sacrifices to be made, but they are sacrifices being made by the community as a whole so that no one is left destitute and that all are cared for.

St. Augustine's words can't be improved upon: "Riches are gained with toil and kept with fear; they are enjoyed with danger and lost with grief. It is hard to be saved if we have them, impossible if we love them, and scarcely can we have them but we shall love them inordinately. Teach us, Lord, this difficult lesson: to manage conscientiously the goods we possess."

List of what we give up/lose and what we gain. Two differences give up father but does not appear in what we gain - perhaps because only one Father who is in heaven. And we gain persecution.

The goal, as Jesus points out to Peter, isn't poverty, but an economy of abundance.

If this message does not take our breath away, if we are not shocked, appalled, grieved or amazed, we have either not yet heard it or heard it so often that we do not really hear it any more p188 Mark by Lamar Williamson