

Lenten Midweek Service (Week Three) 2023

The Rich and the Kingdom of God

Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.” “Which ones?” he inquired.

Jesus replied, “‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

“Who then, can be saved?”

We hear this exchange between Jesus and an unnamed man - we are told this man has great wealth, and can assume he has lots of possessions; donkeys, land, tunics, employees.

We can also assume from this text that this young, unnamed, man believes in Jesus. He refers to Jesus as “teacher”, he claims to know (and practice) the commandments Jesus references, and he is here asking Jesus what is missing from his life so that he might receive eternal life.

Jesus gives him an answer he doesn’t want to hear; sell your things. Sell your stuff. Give the money to the poor - and then follow me. This isn’t **our** first time hearing these words. We’ve heard that Jesus told this young man to sell his possessions handfuls of times. We’ve heard sermons on this passage, we’ve read interpretations of this text, and we’ve struggled with and justified our own neglect of the words “sell your possessions then come follow me”.

What does it look like to sell your stuff? Half of your stuff? A quarter of your stuff? How much stuff do we carry around that could be put to better use by someone in need of it? How much could we donate to places like SnowCap, Don't Shoot PDX, and Boxes of Love if we sold our stuff? What kinds of things could they do with the money? How much farther would they be able to reach?

But - what about us? If we sell all of our possessions - where would we sleep? What would we eat if we gave all of that money to the poor? How would we get to work, or school, or church?

Here we are - at Gethsemane Lutheran Church. Where this building, this congregation, this space possesses pews, communion wares, candles, fonts, lecterns, computers, microphones, cameras, and a whole host of other equipment we consider necessary to "love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind." But, what does Gethsemane possess that is necessary to "love our neighbor"?

How are we following Jesus' teachings - to love neighbor and enemy - if we are caught up possessing material items for the sole purpose of internally worshipping God?

I don't say this to say we shouldn't be loving God in all the ways with all we have - and still I have to wonder what Jesus expected when telling this young man to sell his possessions and give it to the poor. The young man told Jesus he was following those commandments - he was doing his best to be good - he just wanted to know what **more** he could do. Instead, Jesus gave him instructions to give all of that up and follow him instead.

Perhaps that young man was giving 10% to church and charity. Maybe he was even giving 20%. We can hope this young man was fair to his employees, treated his animals well, and respected his neighbors - maybe he even offered them holiday bonuses and dropped extra gift certificates at the feet of those who were left to beg. But, Jesus told him to sell all of that, which made him able to "help" his neighbors and care for himself so that he may follow Jesus.

How are we, Gethsemane, following Jesus? Is it by ensuring our building is still here? Is it by keeping the lights on? Are we being true disciples of Jesus if we allow vetted communities to use this building for community space? Is our rummage sale still serving this community, or just ourselves? Are these midweek services serving our community - or do they feel like an "insider" only space to those who may wander by?

How are **you** following Jesus? What space do you have in your life for giving up possessions and following Jesus closer? How are those second homes, vacation homes, travel trailers, and extra cars allowing you to be a good disciple? What might it look like if you sold one of those things?

I would argue that those of us in this world who find themselves struggling to afford one home, one vacation, one car - or have lived without these possessions - know walking with Jesus better than those of us in this world who sit on excess. Perhaps those people don't look like us in this building right now. Maybe they consider themselves "un-churched". And yet, I would argue still that they know the teachings of Jesus and walk in His ways better than many even if they don't know it.

As we depart today - I am going to ask you to consider 10 possessions you could sell and still live comfortably, healthy, and safely. Maybe you write them down on a list, maybe you hold them in your heart, and maybe yet you put them in a pile and stare at them for a day. However you complete this task; I would ask that after you've named those 10 possessions you consider those who live without them. Who have maybe never had one. Who could maybe really really use one today. Then ask yourself; who does it serve for me to keep these possessions, and how can these things serve my community better?

Amen.