

Blessings Galore

L1-20, March 1, 2020
Mk 10:17-31

The Rev. Dr. Chris Hagen
Lake Nokomis L. Ch., Mpls

Pronouns give it away.

The pronouns we use sets up our worldview and scope of interest.

Pay attention to pronouns.

*As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him,
"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life."*

The self-referencing pronoun gives away his heart;
"what must *I* do."

It's all about himself.

Of all the things about Jesus,

note carefully that Jesus takes us out of ourselves and re-orientes us to others.

All of the teachings and all of the healings and the eventual sacrifice he makes,
is all about re-orienting us to others.

Before the wealthy man even speaks,

note the assumptions he makes about his place with Jesus and with others.

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him...

The wealthy man assumes he can just walk up,

butt ahead of the others who were also waiting to speak,

and presume upon Jesus' schedule as if Jesus was his employee.

It was an unconscious *sense of privilege*,

an unconscious assumption common to we who are wealthy.

A woman bleeding, a paralytic, a foreigner whose daughter is struck with a demon,

they don't assume they can just walk up and begin speaking with Jesus.

The first thing to recognize are *the presumptions* we unconsciously make.

The wealthy man was a good person.

We need to remember that.

He obeys the law, is a responsible driver, mows his lawn often,
a good volunteer in his community,

respected and honest and likeable person.

You all know many people like him.

The wealthy man worked hard for his money,

persevered and saved and was responsible, made good choices.

Nothing wrong with that.

It's what makes for success.

But something was missing.

The investments and accumulated wealth were not enough.

Just being a good person was not satisfying.

What else must I do...?

The pronoun gives him away.

His focus is on himself and his happiness dependent on him achieving.

Jesus' answer is,

"You lack just one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor,
and you will have treasure in heaven;

then come, follow me."

Jesus offers to take the man out of his self-entrapment
and release him into connection with others.

It's about what we think of the property in our care.

It's about our assumptions of

ownership and wealth accumulation and consumption.

My wife and I are updating our wills,
 something we should have done long ago.
 A couple of things struck close to home in this latest exercise.
 First, I have a lot of stuff, material and financial,
 a lot of stuff that I will have to leave behind when my time comes,
 a lot of stuff that I am asking someone else to clear out,
 and I am presuming a lot of my Executor and my Power of Attorney.
 Second, I don't *need* most of my stuff.
 I have more stuff than is necessary and probably more than is healthy.
 Third, most of my stuff has come about *not* because of my hard work and responsibility,
 but most of my stuff is due
 to the fortunate circumstances of my life and the support of many people.
 In other words, *my stuff is gift*.
 Other people work harder than I do,
 hold three or four jobs, working 80, 100 hours a week,
 single parent on limited income, living pay check to pay check,
 and *they* don't get to have more stuff than I do.
Meritocracy is an American myth,
 the idea that working hard will be rewarded with comforts in life
 is for most people simply a myth.
 I am reminded that the stuff in my life is *gift*,
 or rather, my possessions are *a trust given by God*,
an investment in me by our God.
 My money, your money
is an investment God has made in us
 to accomplish something on behalf of God.

Our theme this Lent is *Blessed to Be a Blessing*.
 The art above the font is a visual testimony
 that all we have, our money, our friends,
 our place in this church, our place in society,
 our opportunities and circumstances,
all are blessing from God.
 That is the first step in wisdom,
 the stuff in our lives are not our own achievements,
but a blessing from God.
 With that orientation, all the rest of the Gospel teachings make sense.
 The art above the font, though, recognizes another truth,
 that *our blessing is meant to be shared*.
 Life is not to be a pit of blessing into which God keeps pouring.
 Life is meant to be *opportunity to bring God's blessing to one another*.
 We are *Blessed to be a Blessing*.
 God has *invested* in us so that we might bring goodness to someone else.
 The purpose to our wealth is to share it.
 That what God gives to individuals belongs to the wider public.
 Jesus teaches a truth contrary to prevailing worldly attitude.

This Lent season, during the education hour,
 we have the inter-generational opportunity to discover God's tremendous generosity
 and the joy of participating in generosity.
 Adults teach concepts and children teach happiness as we learn together.
The Generosity Project fosters confidence and trust in God's grace
 and nurtures generosity in the belief that with God, all things are possible,
 as Jesus promises in this Gospel.

A wealthy man, “when he heard this, was shocked and went away grieving,
for he had many possessions.”

His money was more important to him than life with Jesus.

The man assumed that resources are limited.

The man assumed that another’s gain is his loss.

The man assumed that by giving away, somehow his life is diminished.

It’s an attitude of *scarcity*,

an economy of scarcity,

of those who have and those who don’t.

It’s a worldview that we all are in competition,

that when someone takes more, they are a better person.

It’s a worldview that has now gotten to the point

that on this earth at this time (in 2018),

26 people owned the same wealth

*as the 3.8 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity.*¹

Or to say it another way,

just 26 people on this earth at this time

can raise the standard of living of *3.8 billion poor people* to the world’s average.

A worldview that prioritizes capital over people

depends on an attitude of scarcity, of accumulating at the expense of another.

It has become an unsustainable economy.

Jesus offers an alternative to a worldview of scarcity.

It begins with your relationship to God.

First, do you believe God to be loving and generous?

Second, can we depend on God to keep God’s word?

Third, do you believe John 3:16 that God so loved the world that God gave his only son?

If you believe God to be loving and generous to those God loves,

and you believe God will keep God’s word

when God promises to give us all we need from day to day,

and you believe that God loves *all* the world, not just a select few,

then possessing and owning and attitude of scarcity is truly strange,

then God’s blessings are the way to be blessing to others.

The pivotal issue is what do you believe about God

and how will you live in response to God’s generosity?

An attitude of generosity will see the world differently.

A position that all we have is only entrusted for awhile will lead us to use it differently.

It is a total shift from prevailing views.

“For mortals it is impossible, but not with God; for God all things are possible.”

One last thing about the rich man who ran up to Jesus,

Jesus said, “... sell what you own and give the money to the poor...

then come, follow me.”

Jesus did not tell him to sell *everything*.

Jesus did not tell him to become *poor himself*.

Rather, Jesus invited him to unencumber himself with grasping possessions,

that by sharing we *always* have enough.

Rather, Jesus invited him to see his property in different light, to use his property differently,

in a way that connects him to people he had been avoiding,

in a way that sees his possessions as *a public good*.

That is how to follow Jesus.

Amen.

¹ “Public Good or Private Wealth?,” Oxfam,

https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620599/bp-public-good-or-private-wealth-210119-summ-en.pdf?utm_source=indepth, accessed 2/28/2020.