

Job 23:1-9,16-17
Psalm 22:1-15
Hebrews 4:12-16
Mark 10:17-31

Proper 23B
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Enough?

Have you ever been at that sort of crossroads where you're invited to trade in everything you thought you knew, everything you thought you could count on, everything you thought defined you and gave you status? I have. Twice.

The first time was when after much prayer and heartache and discernment and therapy, I chose to end my first marriage. I gave up so much when I did that. Those of you who have ended relationships you thought would be forever, know what it is I am talking about. When I gave up my marriage, I left behind a sort of comfort and even prestige that seems to surround the words "my husband, my partner, my spouse, my wife." I gave up the certainty of my place in community. And money. I gave up money, not because I was incapable of earning it, but because while my marriage was not sustainable, being the sort of mom I longed to be, was possible. And it meant leaving the high-pay, high-stress jobs behind. Ending my marriage meant a complete loss of financial security. My son would always be provided for. Not true for me.

And while all that mattered, what for me was harder to give up, was that dream of the perfect little family with the sweet house on Bainbridge Island, where everybody has pot-lucks and everyone is happy. It was my version of that old American dream. And I gave it up.

The second time was when I went to seminary – or rather when I knew I couldn't avoid the question of whether or not to leave everything I knew, everything I had worked for, any possibility of ever getting ahead financially, selling my beautiful little house on Bainbridge, leaving my dear heart girlfriends and the church I loved so dearly, and moving two states away from my son... that was the second time. I had worked so hard to make up for those impoverished years when my son was young and had a sweet life to show for it. But it was on to a different sort of sweetness for me, with different riches to cultivate and cherish, the kind of riches that have to do with generous hearts and generous spirits too. I longed to be rich in kindness. Rich in forgiveness. Rich in curiosity. Rich in understanding. Rich in grace. Rich in wonder. Rich in gratitude. Rich in goodness. Rich in love. Being steeped in Jesus for three years would set me on that path. I was headed back to the unspeakable riches of my "impoverished life" when my son was little. He said it better than I ever could, and I will never forget his words. "Mama," he said, "we are not rich of money but we are rich of love.."

This gospel story we hear today, this story of a faithful, fortunate, good and unspeakably blessed young man? It's not a metaphor. And that's a little hard to fathom. There are some things to know about that rich young man and the world he lived in, and some things to know about the disciples too. While on the face of things they appear to be very different – he is a well-educated, scripturally literate young man from a wealthy family and the disciples are a motley

crew of fishermen who were likely uneducated and as I recall, "...left everything and followed [Jesus]."¹ They didn't leave their stuff behind because their stuff was bad. The rich young man's stuff and money weren't bad either. The disciples left their stuff behind because when Jesus called, they had to go, and all their stuff? The nets, the boats, the ropes, all of it... well, it just would have been in the way.

While these two don't seem to have much in common on the face of it, we'll find if we dig a little deeper, we will see that Peter and this rich young man have some very important things in common. Neither one of them could believe that they hadn't done enough already. The rich young man – he knew all the commandments and had lived them out his whole life long. He was a religious and righteous person. And yet there was still some longing in him, some wanting that couldn't be satisfied with money, possessions, prestige, power or even commandments. What else could he possibly need to DO? You see in their day, the degree to which you had money and stuff was perceived as equal to the degree to which God had blessed you. So when Jesus told the disciples rich people would have a really hard time getting into heaven, even the disciples responded: *What the heck? If they can't be saved, who can?*

Well, Jesus said, it IS impossible for humans, but for God all things are possible. In debunking the myth that God's blessings are measured in dollars and cents – a myth that still needs debunking in some parts today, Jesus threw them all for a loop. All Peter could say was, *Seriously? We left everything and followed you, is even that not enough? What else are we supposed to DO? It's been so hard already, when will enough be enough?* The rich young man asked the same. *Have I not done enough?*

I don't think Peter or the rich young man were bragging or trying to prove anything to Jesus. I think both of them had worked really hard to live really good lives and to do what they thought God was asking of them. It seemed like enough. And it wasn't. You see, if we believe what we say, that everything comes from God, and belongs to God and we are only stewards of God's bounty, then the answer is that no amount of doing will ever be enough. Enough is what happens when we stop doing. Oh I don't mean that we stop living good lives. What I mean is that ENOUGH only happens when there is complete and total surrender. Not two percent. Not five percent. Not ten percent. But everything. One hundred percent.

I believe with my whole heart that God wants us to surrender absolutely everything and NOT because God wants back what God gave us. I think God wants us to surrender absolutely everything and especially the hard things because God loves us and wants abundant life for us. And life can only be as abundant as God desires when life is lived completely and totally in God. As it turns out, the more we give up, the more we give away, the more we let loose of carving out sides, making some people more important than others, the more we let loose of control and accomplishment and who's right and who's wrong, the more we surrender... the freer and happier and more peaceful we become.

¹ Luke 5:11

There are times in life when we really do have to pick. The choices aren't always so dramatic as giving away all of our possessions in order to be possessed by God rather than by those possessions. They aren't always as dramatic as leaving a marriage or a wildly successful career. But you know what? Sometimes, they are.

This story of the rich young man? It really is about money and giving it all away, not because that's what each and every one of us needs to do – you're breathing a sigh of relief now, right? - but certainly because that is what he needed to do. And he couldn't do it. He couldn't do it and he was so sad. I think Jesus was so sad too. Jesus loved him. And perhaps the hardest part of the story is that Jesus asked him to do that really, really hard thing precisely because he loved him, and he wanted the richest, sweetest possible life for him. It's not a metaphor. It was real life then and its real life now. It may not be all our money we need to give up, but surely we have our attachments. Jesus asked everything of that rich young man. It's no different for us. Really.

God wants the very best for us and from us. And sometimes that means we need to give up the things we're deeply attached to because our attachment attaches us to the things and not to God. People who work the 12 steps each day know this very well. They know what it is to give up and give over better than most people I've encountered. And if you have the good fortune to share the confidence of someone working those steps each day, you have the opportunity to hear stories of the incredible difficulty and unspeakable freedom and grace that come of giving up the thing that has possessed of you. Whether that's an unhealthy relationship, a bad attitude, a sense of certainty, an addiction, being right, an intolerance for those who are unlike you or maybe even your money... the freedom to live in right relationship with God, with yourself and with the ones around you comes of surrender. Not control. Surrender.

It's not easy. Lots of times we can't do it. And yet Jesus assures us, with God all things are possible. You see, God doesn't need our money or our good deeds or even our kindness or our love. But our neighbors do. The vulnerable people in our midst do. The people we disagree with or just plain don't like, do. So when we offer all that we are and all that we have for the love of God and God's people, I'm guessing God is filled with delight... not because we've behaved ourselves, but because God wants this profoundly rich, generous and wonderful life for us and for everyone around us.

It's not lost on me, nor on you, I imagine, that this gospel passage is appointed for what is, in many churches, including our church, Stewardship Sunday. While the notion of one day being set apart for conversation about God's extraordinary generosity and our response to that generosity seems silly to me, today is as good a day as any to reflect on attachment and surrender, to reflect on God's unspeakable generosity and the reality that no matter who are or what we give, it is never about being good enough any more than it's about being rich enough or smart enough or clever enough or powerful enough. God doesn't care about that, and because that is so, neither should we. God wants for us infinitely more than we could ever ask or imagine, lives of unspeakable abundance. And Jesus tells us very clearly that the way to have that is to surrender – to detach from the ideas and certainties and things we're attached to and

to cling to the God who loves us. To give and give and give and give, not because God needs our gifts. The Jesus movement, the true church will go on and on simply because it is of God and God is eternal. What we concern ourselves with at this point in our life together, is how the particular iteration of the Body of Christ that is St Barnabas will go on and do God's good work in the world. It's quite simple, really. We don't have a fat budget. In fact, there's no fluff at all. It takes a certain amount of money to do church the way St Barnabas wants to do church. That money, for the most part, comes from us. Those are the simple facts. Like the fact that the rich young man knew all the commandments and had lived them his whole life. Like the fact that Peter left everything and followed Jesus. But what we're learning is that those things are not so much what matters, and they are surely not what the spiritual discipline of giving is about. In the face of all that God has given us, ALL that God has given us, is the question we really want to be asking "Haven't I already done enough?" Wouldn't we rather be pouring out our gratitude, lost in wonder love and praise, asking "What more, holy and gracious and generous and loving God? What more may I give?" Amen.