

## WHAT MUST I DO?

Mark 10:17-31

*(Preached on October 13, 2024)*

Sell what I own and give the money away!! Oh, Jesus, you have got to be kidding! And so the young man went away grieving for he had many possessions.

Perhaps I should stop this message right here and we could just sit and think about what Jesus said to the man and how it would affect us; then we could go home.

Sorry! I have more to say and some stories to share.

The Rev. Stephen Schuette, Pastor of the Salem Evangelical UCC tells this story:

There is a story about an old monk who has been mentoring a young disciple. Believing that he has the ability to be on his own, the monk allows the boy to live in a lean-to near the river bank. Each night, happy as a lark, the young disciple puts out his loincloth, his only possession, to dry. One morning he is dismayed to find that it has been torn to shreds by rats. So, he begs for a second loincloth from the villagers.

When the rats come to destroy that one, he gets a cat to keep the rats away. But now he has to beg not only for food but also for milk for the cat. To get around that, he buys a cow.

But then he has to seek food for the cow. He concludes, finally, that it would be easier to work the land around his hut, so he leaves off his prayers and meditations, and commits himself to growing crops to feed the cow. The operation expands. He hires workers. He marries a wife who keeps the household running smoothly. Pretty soon he is one of the wealthiest people in the village.

Several years later the monk comes back to find a mansion where the lean-to had been. "What is the meaning of this?" the monk asks. The disciple replies, "Holy Father, there was no other way for me to keep my loincloth."

What do we do with all our stuff? Drive around western Massachusetts and notice all the self-storage facilities. Not only are they filled with stuff, but money must be spent to keep that stuff safe and more importantly out of sight. Do we know what is in that storage unit? Can we find it when we need it? What do we do with all that clutter? Is it possible that that stuff is crowding out the spiritual part of our lives?

A father gave his daughter a generous weekly allowance, on the condition that she kept good records of how she spent the money. At the end of the month, the dad was going to check on how she spent the money. When he checked on how she did, he was delighted that she had kept good records. But he came across several items that were listed as TLOK. In fact, about 1/5 of her money was listed this way. He asked her what TLOK meant. She said, "Well, it's this way. Sometimes I did not jot down

the amounts I spent. When I sat down to try to jot down all that I spent, I couldn't for the life of me remember where I had spent all that money. I couldn't make my accounts balance, so I placed several dollars under TLOK.

The father said, "But what does it mean?" She said it means, "THE LORD ONLY KNOWS!"

It seems that these stories point to a bit of greed on the part of the people in them.

The rich young man in today's scripture who professed to have done all the right things required of his faith, especially the knowledge of the commandments and who impressed Jesus in such a way that Jesus loved him. I believe that Jesus felt real compassion for the young man.

We must remember that at this time the young man did not know the end of Jesus' life story. He had no idea that this prophet was the Son of God; the Christ of the Apostle's Creed! Likely the disciples did not look upon Jesus that way either. All the events of the crucifixion and resurrection had not happened. How could they know?

In the book of Luke, the young man is called a ruler. He did have a great deal of wealth and he was humble when he knelt before him and asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" What rule must I follow to make God pleased with me? I've kept all the commandments. What am I doing wrong?

A story is told out of the Orient of a young Buddhist monk who sat outside his temple two thousand years ago, hands clasped in prayer. He looked very pious and he chanted 'Amita Buddha' all day. Day after day he intoned these words, believing that he was acquiring grace. One day the head priest of the temple sat next to him and began rubbing a piece of brick against a stone. Day after day he rubbed one against the other. This went on week after week until the young monk could no longer contain his curiosity, and he finally blurted out, "Father, what are you doing?" "I'm trying to make a mirror," said the head priest, "But that's impossible!" said the young monk, "You can't make a mirror from brick," "True," replied the head priest. "Just as it is impossible to acquire grace by a chant."

The young man in today's reading from Matthew was completely overcome and oppressed by his wealth and since he asked Jesus what he had to do, Jesus told him to stop thinking about and worshiping his money and to give his money away to help others. I am reminded of Jesus' Great Commandment to love God and to love your neighbor.

Sadly, the young man walked away. He had asked for the truth and could not handle it when he heard it. To love God and his neighbor was way beyond what he was prepared to do. He could not give up his beautiful lifestyle but was willing to give up his quest for eternal life. He walked away grieving.

Garrison Keillor tells a story about a man in the Lake Wobegon Church who realizes that it is almost time for the offering. He discovers that he has no cash and decides to discretely write

a check and hides his checkbook within the Bible. He begins to write a check for thirty dollars because he wants whoever counts the offering to see how much he gave. While trying not to be obvious he writes the check and when putting it into the offering plate he realizes that he has added two zeros making the check for three hundred dollars! He was not sure what to do. Certainly, he could not go to the church collector to ask for his check back! Suddenly the man felt a wonderful feeling. Keillor finishes his story by saying that although the man had made a large error, it was the first time that the man felt fully alive in a long time. He had put God first.

My friends, may we take charge of your desire for stuff. Let us put God first in our lives. Let us find out what it means to be fully alive!

AMEN

W.S. Bray

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