



Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon by Revd Sharmain James



Sunday 10 October 2021

READINGS

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

What must I do to inherit eternal life?

In one of the Indiana Jones movies – Indiana (played by Harrison Ford) was looking for the Holy Grail. When he and his team finally arrived at the site where it was located – he had to go through a number of tests to get to the specific room where the HOLY GRAIL rested.

He weathered death. He had to spell the name of Jehovah correctly in Latin. Finally after making it through the test successfully – he came into a room with a variety of cups. He was faced with the challenge of having to choose which one belonged to the carpenter from Nazareth. In the mean time – his enemies were pursuing him and they too met him in the room with the assortment of cups.

There was a guardian knight there and that guardian knight said that the person who chose the cup must choose carefully – in fact his exact words were choose wisely – because there were consequences tied to the choice. Choosing the right cup led to life.

Today's gospel passage is something like Indiana Jones - there is a search for something. In today's Gospel we hear the story of the rich young man who searches and desires eternal life. And we meet him here in Mark 10. In fact, he appears in all three synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Matthew tells us he's young. Luke tells us he's a ruler. All three tell us he's rich, and show us this search for eternal life is an ancient one. This man met Jesus face to face to ask about eternal life. Verse 17 shows us he came to the right person.

He respected Jesus. He was like so many who came to Jesus before, falling at his feet, begging for help. But he comes not for a cure to an illness, nor for an exorcism. He comes for a different reason. He has a question. "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" That is an important question. It is a question we also wrestle with – I KNOW I DO. It's the kind of question that keeps us up all night.

The gospel passage says – he comes running to Jesus. The fact that he comes running to Jesus tells us something about his attitude toward life. He falls at Jesus feet because he recognizes that something is missing in his life. He is consumed with a longing for more. He had provision for this life, but perhaps he realised that he had not made provision for the next.

When Jesus cites the commandments of Moses to him - - he replies "All these I have kept,". I've done everything I've been taught to do. I've followed the religious rules of my upbringing. I've honoured the tradition, kept the rules, respected the laws, and practiced the rituals. And yet I'm hungry. I'm unfulfilled. The life I've lived is insufficient, because something I can barely name is drawing me to you."

Mark's Gospel tells us that Jesus "looks at the young man and loves him."

But notice that Jesus's love doesn't leave the young man where he is. In other words, Jesus's love offers a challenge. Because Jesus loves the young man so much, Jesus tells him the truth. Not the half-truth, not the watered-down truth, but the whole truth: "You lack 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."

So," Jesus says, "Make me your only possession. Attach your life to me alone. Go. Sell. Give. Come. Follow. Then you'll have eternal life because you'll have me. I am the way, and the truth, and the life." - no comes o the Father except through Jesus. Mark's Gospel tells us that the young man is "shocked" by Jesus's invitation and goes away grieving.

What I find shocking is that Jesus lets him. Jesus doesn't try to persuade him. He doesn't plead. He doesn't manipulate. He doesn't judge. He doesn't run after him. He honours the man's freedom - freedom to refuse eternal life - and allows him to walk away. What caught my eye-s? This young man was the only person in the entire New Testament who left the presence of Jesus sad. Some of us are in the same position as this young man. We want life after death. But we don't want it badly enough; at least, not bad enough to give up everything for it.

I can't help but wonder what would grieve and shock me - if Jesus asked me to let go of everything I have - for the sake of my spiritual growth and well-being. What is the "one thing" I lack, the one thing that might cause me to walk away if God points it out to me and says, "Let it go?" He thinks, that everything can be bought for a price, including eternal life. Jesus shows that - No price tag can be put upon eternal life - - - eternal life is a value that cannot be bought.

You see, Jesus was not condemning the rich young man to a life of poverty or hardship. He was not asking the young man to become some sort of "beggar for Jesus". But, the request Jesus makes of the rich young man is "COME AND FOLLOW ME". Come and be with me, come and be my friend. come and join my ministry of love and light and truth and healing in and for the world.

Join me in telling everyone who will listen that God's ways are greater than the world's ways that our mutual flourishing is found in the care of and connection with others. Jesus is not saying deprive yourself and then figure out what's next for you now that you are homeless and penniless. Instead, he says, come join me in the great and wondrous adventure of setting the world to rights.

Jesus is saying - WE GAIN ETERNAL LIFE - - BY ENGAGING WITH LIFE HERE AND NOW.

This young man wanted a different quality of life, a new beginning, a new day, and Jesus offers it to him.

To get this new life, the old one must be let go of. And that's hard when there is so much to let go of. The man has invested in what he has. And what he wants will cost him everything he has. The young man isn't ready; he opts instead for fear, control, and independence. And Jesus lets him. He lets him because that is the terrible and beautiful requirement of love. Love lets go. Love hopes in absence.

Today's gospel passage provides us with the opportunity to re-evaluate our relationship with money or wealth. Notice that Jesus didn't condemn the young man for being wealthy – because wealth in itself was not bad – it makes things more difficult for a person who is wealthy to realise their full dependence on God, BUT today's gospel - provides us with the opportunity to re-evaluate how we determine the value of our own and other's lives.

Real life is a life spent living into who we were created to be: relational beings designed to help and aid one another, generously giving of ourselves and content with only what is necessary. The invitation to follow Jesus, to befriend Jesus, to dine with Jesus...to walk in love as Christ loves us...remains ever before us.

Go out and show love to someone