

Colossians 2:6-7, Mark 10:17-25

...So Walk In Him

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We are continuing our series on Stewardship by looking at what Paul describes as the pathway to abundant generosity. Colossians 2 begins with this practical and beautiful picture of how a person comes to understand the fullness of the generosity of Jesus, so that we may do the same. Last week, we looked at where it all begins, as in every overarching story in Scripture, generosity and thanksgiving begin with grace—grace shown and grace known. Today, we are moving to the next clause in these verses, and what it means to walk with Jesus.

So as you are able, I want to invite you to stand with me, and read these verses from Colossians 2 once again. Read them out loud in such a way that the words sink down into your heart.

**Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.**

Today, we are also looking at Mark 10:17-25:

**And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.**

**And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”**

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Amen, you can be seated and let's pray.

PRAYER

It makes me so happy that my little ones Christian and Annie have recently discovered an interest in something near and dear to my own childhood, the Muppets. So far we have watched The Original Muppet Movie as well as the new rendition, Muppets Most

Wanted. And let me tell you, it doesn't matter how old you are, there is still something magical about that green felt puppet singing Rainbow Connection.

Those characters have such personality that it feels as though they are actually real people. But nothing reveals the incongruity and unfortunate truth that the Muppets aren't actually real more than seeing Kermit the Frog walk. It is comical in its absurdity. But in life, sometimes it is those moments of absurdity that provide the most clarity.

There were times in Jesus' ministry that in order to get his point across, the only way he could break through the hardened shell of seriousness, was to get his disciples laughing hysterically. As the longtime Presbyterian Pastor Lloyd Ogilvie wrote, "true humor reveals incongruity and irrationality, and in so doing frees us from our grim grip on life."

It is no wonder that John Stewart and Stephen Colbert have become our go to guys for news. When it all seems so bleak, you just can't help but laugh. It's what gets us through each day.

In this morning's gospel reading, the rich young man leaves his social platform to come and kneel at Jesus' feet. And with his question he exposed the very heart of the disciples' insecurity. One question brought it all together in a way that left them wide-eyed and vulnerable. "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" This was their deepest question.

Jesus' response, so calm and matter of fact, was like a flaming arrow that pierced right into the heart of every person within earshot. "Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." There it was. He just said it. With that terse response, every one of his followers was cut to the heart. Everything you've done thus far to create a security blanket of wealth and possessions is worthless. This response was carved into the hearts of his followers. And it says: "Disheartened by the saying, he walked away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

Recognizing how deflating this encounter was for everyone, Jesus offers a pithy parable that would leave them laughing hysterically. "Look fellas, how hard will it be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God?"

"I don't know Jesus, how hard will it be?"

Now at this point in the narrative, you have to hear the warmth and love in Jesus' voice when he says: "So hard that it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God."

Laughter ensues, and the tense moment turns into a teachable moment, even though Jesus takes nothing from the razor sharp poignancy that spoke to them. Jesus uses the humor that is lying right beneath the surface of this story to show how utterly absurd this situation is. "A well funded IRA over the riches of God's Kingdom that lies in waiting for those who are humble enough to simply receive it?"

Comic writers know that the tragic and the humorous are two sides of the same coin. I don't know whether to laugh or to cry, but I think Jesus wants us to do both at the same time, when we realize just how ridiculous it is to try and thread our camel through the eye of a needle. But in a way, this is our story. When we succumb to the mindset that our money is where we find our security, when we believe cash is king, when we count on our 401k to rollover into heaven's economy, when we trust gifts over and above the giver... why, we are walking as absurdly and awkwardly as Kermit the Frog down Broadway.

This young man had probably been standing on the sidelines watching Jesus and all of his followers, tallying up his spiritual credit, until finally one day he burst through with a flood of impetuosity. "Good teacher," even his salutation implies he's tipping the scales in his favor. The young man is buttering up the teacher to get the response he's fishing for. One writer says that the scales of obligation are loaded and the response implied.

"What must I do to inherit?" Do you see the ridiculous in this statement? Do? To inherit? But each of us in our own way hears the message, the love, the grace, the forgiveness, and thinks to ourselves, "What do I have to do to make it my own?" This man had everything he could ever want, and still he wanted one more thing to add to his collection.

So Jesus, seeing the absurdity of where this is going, decides to play along. Starting with the Old Testament ethical commands he says, how are you doing on this front? "Great teacher, I've kept them all from my childhood." How gentle of Jesus, knowing that the man's basic problem is that he's broken the first command by making his possessions into his god. But nonetheless, Jesus moves on to the next matter, the crux of the whole issue.

Here, it says Jesus looked at him and loved him. For all we know, this guy is not a scoundrel, he may actually be a pretty decent guy. Knowing all this, Jesus loves him, and says to him, "You lack one thing." There is one area in your life where you've failed, one area where you still fall short. And because of that miscalculation, he is kept from realizing the true meaning in his life. It was this oversight that kept this young man from seeing the true reason for which he was born.

Our wealth keeps us from God. For the rich young man, it was an extension of him. Like many who have great wealth will attest, what he owned actually owned him. This man's bank account was inextricably linked with the very DNA of his life. His possessions possessed him.

One of the most dangerous and painful operations Jesus conducts on his people is to surgically remove the malignancy that is the love of riches. It's dangerous, because for so many it's a procedure that never takes place. It remains that unsightly trait that we're just not willing to let the physician get his healing and exacting hands on.

The love of money and the desire for wealth and security keep us from becoming the people God created us to be. When it has its claws in us, it will eat us up from the inside. The most tragic part of this story is that the young man did indeed want eternal life, he did want the life that God had in store for him, he even did many of the things that go along with that life. When Jesus asks him about his fulfillment of the Ten Commandments, he says I've done them all. But like a keen parent, Jesus is able to see through the façade and look directly to the one area we continue to withhold. With this young man, it was the idolatry of self, the trust in his own sufficiency and not God's sufficiency. Money was the thing in his life he loved more than Jesus. It was what kept him from the joy of walking with God.

Jesus looks at the man and it says he loved him. Why is he so sympathetic to him? Why does this story pull at our heartstrings? Because in this young man, we can see ourselves. Jesus knows, we struggle with it, too. Not just that we too have things that keep us from being close to God, but that we struggle with the call Jesus gives to sell everything and give it to the poor. Would we? As Paul says in Colossians, the response to receiving God's grace is to walk in it. Some translations use the word "live" here. I don't think that is a sufficiently strong word. Jesus is not just inviting you to a personal philosophy, he's inviting you to a journey that will require your entire self, mind, body, soul AND stuff. Believing it's true is half the battle, the other half is abandoning what holds us back, and walking in the freedom of the Holy Spirit and the liberty of Jesus.

This is why Jesus introduces some humor to ease the tension. When we laugh, our laughter softens us up to hear the truth. Our riches could keep us out of the kingdom. One writer puts it this way: we could miss life in our lust for living; we may acquire everything and end up with nothing.

Walking with Jesus is much more natural and freeing when we aren't carrying such a heavy load. Generosity removes the yoke of stuff from our shoulders and enables us to walk in the free and abundant grace and joy and, yes, even provision of our God—who for good measure throws in precisely what we need. The Psalmist was spot on when he says in Psalm 34, those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.