



Treasure in Heaven

Scripture Reading: Mark 10:17-31

Growing up in Maryland, we frequently visited our cousins in Virginia. My Uncle Jack had a small grocery store near the Marine Corps War Memorial with its iconic sculpture of six Marines raising an American flag over the island of Iwo Jima. One of my favorite memories is of stopping

by his store on the way to or from their house and being given a small bag to fill with treats. With my parents urging me not to overdo it and my uncle encouraging me to take all I wanted, I joyfully made my way to the candy shelves and picked out my treasures.

It strikes me as I reflect on the Scripture passage for this coming Sunday that my uncle never asked me for anything in return. There was nothing I needed to do or could do to receive his love or generosity. I never once thought as we approached his store about such things. I simply knew, with child-like faith, that he'd be there to welcome me with his bright smile, his twinkling eyes, a hearty hug and, sooner or later, a little paper bag.

Just prior to Sunday's text in Mark 10, Jesus told his disciples that the kingdom of God belongs to little children and those who receive it like them. There is nothing we need to or could ever do to earn God's love or generosity. Yet now, a rich man comes asking what he must do to inherit God's kingdom. And Jesus answer is that he must sell everything he owns, give the money to the poor for then he will have treasure in heaven, and then come and follow him. He must become vulnerable himself, dependent, trusting solely on God's mercy, provision, and love. He must become like a little child.

This, of course, goes against virtually everything our world tells us, our pride tells us, our good sense tells us. And yet, again and again, this is the call for us, to sweep away anything and everything that deceives us into thinking our hope for the future, our relationship with God, our pathway toward fullness of life is something we can obtain by our own efforts. I'm not saying that selling everything you own and giving it to the poor would not be an exceptional effort. Nor am I saying that God is not calling you to do that; I'm aware that you, like me, have to keep wrestling with just what God is calling us to do. I am saying, though, most of all, that it is not actually our effort, whatever it may be, that makes any of us able to enter the kingdom of God. Our own efforts cannot make it happen. It is not just the wealthy for whom entering the kingdom of God is impossible. As Jesus says in this passage, it is impossible for all mortals. Fortunately, to put it mildly, Jesus also declares that "for God all things are possible."

This is why it is so crucial that we lay aside, sell off and give away everything that we are tempted to put our hope in and give our allegiance to. We need to trust in, put our hope in, and give our allegiance to God alone. We need to trust God with child-like faith, believing that God is there, here

with us in fact, delighted to welcome us with a bright smile, twinkling eyes, a hearty hug and, yes, all the riches of heaven.

The man in this passage was “shocked” and the disciples “greatly astounded”. Later as they continued with Jesus toward Jerusalem, they were “amazed” and “afraid.” This isn’t surprising since virtually everything our world tells us, our pride tells us, our good sense tells us is that we need to be in control, make things happen, trust in our own effort. But with love in his eyes, Jesus invited the rich man to a different way, the way of Jesus and those who would follow him. It is the way of vulnerability, of being last of all and servant of all, of denying oneself, taking up one’s cross, and in child-like faith trusting and following him.

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you for looking at me and loving me. I confess that I fall short of your call. I am not only uncertain at times just what you are calling me to do, but I am also not as open to listening and following your leading as I should be and want to be. Forgive me, I pray, and grant me courage. Help me in my weakness, strengthen my faith, and enable me both to will and to work for your good pleasure. In those times when I do well and those when I don’t, in those times when I think I am strong and those when I know I am not, help me always to trust your love and your ability to accomplish your good purpose for me and through me, to the glory of your name, for with you all things are possible and to you be all praise and glory and thanks. Amen.

Some Things to Try:

- Write down those things that you are putting your hope and faith in as you look to the future (e.g. savings, political leaders, education, relationships, etc.). Talk with God about these things. Consider how these things lead you to trust more or less in God, and pray about what you can do to better keep these things in proper perspective and relationship to your dependence on and allegiance to God.
- Ask Jesus to guide you as to what you should do with the money and possessions, however much or little they may be, that God has blessed you with. Do something courageous and loving in response to his leading.
- Sit with God and prayerfully think of the things that you lean on or work at to try to make yourself worthy before God. Acknowledge them before God, confess any sin of pride that may be driving your efforts, and thank God that you are loved as you are.

Verse for Meditation and Memorization:

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” Mark 10:27

Additional Suggested Reading:

Matthew 25:31-46

Amos 6:6-7, 10-15

Psalm 90:12-17

Hebrews 4:12-16