

Sermon for October 15, Proper 23, Anne- Marie Jeffery

[Mark 10:17-27\(28-31\)](#)

Why does Jesus talk so much about money? Why does Jesus say such difficult things about money? In this morning's gospel here comes a man – a good man – one who has kept all the commandments from birth. Jesus recognizes this man's devotion and loved for God. He sees that this man is a follower of God and he tells him - now go and sell all that you have, give your money to the poor, and follow me – The man is shocked, some translations say appalled. He has many possessions. He cannot do this. –and he goes away grieving. This was a good man. Why did Jesus ask him take this drastic step?

Why was money a block for him to follow Jesus? Why does money get in the way of our following Jesus? Money and spiritual growth, money and our relationship with God - what do they have to do with one another? Why can't we worship God, be good people, read the Bible, give money to the church so it can keep its doors open and move on. Is Jesus asking us to give everything we have away?

This passage makes me and just about everybody I know uncomfortable. Unless you are someone like St. Francis or Mother Teresa, this passage gets you right where it hurts – your money, your security – you know, let's name it, your bank accounts, the equity in your house, your retirement, those 401Ks and Roth IRA's and whatever else is out there. When we hear this gospel, it seems as if Jesus is asking us to give these up. If you had been that man who came to Jesus, and who Jesus told to sell everything, what would you have done?

I think our first instinct is to try and distance ourselves from this gospel. The passage does say that this was a wealthy man – perhaps he was wealthy like a movie star or a pro-football player – you know people who have so much money that they don't know what to do with it. I don't think any of us are quite at that level and yet in so many other ways we are wealthy. We are wealthy compared to people starving in Africa and India. We are wealthy compared to people who have come here from South and Central America – the ones who come here, work and send all their money back home. We are wealthy compared to the people who eat breakfast here at The Welcome Table every Sunday. And here comes this passage

back to us challenging our relationship with money and possessions causing us to take a good look at ourselves. Why can't Jesus leave us alone? We'll give to the poor. We'll make our contribution. We'll do our good works. Why can't we have money and follow Jesus?

The problem seems to be that money and possessions pose a threat to one's relationship with Jesus. The bookⁱ we are using for this stewardship season says – Wealth has a way of luring us to trust in it. Wealth has a way of convincing us to stake our future on our accumulation of it. Wealth has a way of tricking us into thinking that without it we are nothing. Wealth does this to us even though we know it can so easily fall away – after medical bills, a bad stock market or loss of a job. The point of these passages is not that money in and of itself is evil. It is that money can so easily be what we put our trust in instead of God. So Jesus is putting this issue front and center. Jesus is asking us to have a good hard look at our money and our possessions and to see where those are in our lives.

We are taught that we need money. We need money to be secure. We need money to be safe. Money is one of those other gods that sneak into our lives and take us away from the one true God. There are no golden calves being paraded around and no foreign God that we are told to worship. No it is much more subtle and it comes at us in every direction – TV, billboards and the culture that we live in. Now our money and possessions are not bad. Jesus accepted the gift of expensive oil poured on his feet. Jesus ate at peoples homes and shared their food and drink.

Money can do a lot of good in this world. No our money and possessions are not evil but they can be dangerous to our souls because they give us a sense of security that we are afraid of losing. That fear can be very strong. We fear that we won't have enough. We fear that we won't be able to take care of ourselves in our retirement, fear that we will be old and lost and alone out on the streets. We have seen it up close and center here at Epiphany with our work with the poor. Not having enough is very real to us. We know people who have lost everything and we don't want to go there. How will God take care of us if that happens to us in this world? And that is the danger of money – that we will put our trust in our money and possessions – believing that they will be enough to keep us to keep us out of pain and out of trouble and not in God.

I don't know if Jesus is really asking us to give everything away as much as he is asking us to look at our attachment to our money and possessions and get it in the right place in our lives. So what do we do? What do we do when we are frozen in place terrified telling Jesus to get away from our retirement and all our possessions that make us safe? What do we do when this fear gets into our hearts and we can get rid of it? What do we do when we forget that nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus and that only in God can we truly trust?

Well the first thing is to remember what Jesus says in the passage. For mortals it is impossible, but not for God. With God all things are possible. Jesus knows this letting go of our money is hard for us. He tells the disciples twice that it will be hard to enter the kingdom of God and he reminds us that for us it is impossible but for God all things are possible. Now that doesn't let us off the hook from examining this issue. We can't just say – oh good. It is impossible for us. We can't do this. We'll just wait for God to make it possible. Jesus keeps bringing this money issue up. He put it in front of us again and again. Yes it is impossible for us but Jesus wants us to have a look at our relationship with money.

So we ask the hard questions. We look at the role money plays in our life. We look at whether we are sharing it with those in need. We look at whether we are using it well – maybe to make a difference in this world. When we start letting our money go, something is lifted and we are freed – freed from its shackles and free to experience our real source of treasure. We remember that letting go of our money and getting to that place of freedom and true relationship with God is a process. We don't start and exercise program and get into shape after day one. We have to workout. And so it is the same with our relationship with money. We practice giving. We practice being generous. We practice giving intentionally. We practice letting go. We read the bible and hear what God tells us about money. And we pray that God may enter our hearts and free us from our fears and free us to be the loving generous people of God.

And like working out, our working on our relationship with money is not a one time thing that is done and is over. To stay fit, one has to keep working out. In this culture that we live in where we constantly hear that we need money to be safe and secure and to be somebody – we have to practice – we have to keep on doing our cardio and give our money to others. We have to do our weight lifting and struggle with what scripture

tells us about money. Doing these things helps us let go of money's hold on us, helps free us, and helps God get into our hearts and do what is impossible for us – to help us realize that in the end it is God in whom we can trust.

Letting go of our money is not easy and Jesus knows it is not easy. He has to tell the disciples twice about how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus knows our hearts. He knows how afraid we are to lose all those things that are put in place to keep us safe – safe from this crazy world. Jesus is tapping at our hearts saying don't be afraid. Don't let that fear of losing everything get in the way of our relationship. Money and possessions will not truly protect you. I will. I will be there for you.

Money and possessions are not your gods. Share them with others. Don't let them rule you. I can release that fear in your heart. I will love and be there for you always.

ⁱ Ask, Thank, Tell, Improving Stewardship ministry in Your Congregation, Charles R. Lane.