

Postures: The Rich Man

Mark 10:17-27

Good Morning Church Family, and welcome to our family who are joining us online. It's good to be together this morning.

Today is the first Sunday of the Christian Season of the Lent. Lent officially began this week as we marked Ash Wednesday together, and now, over the next 40 days, we're journeying together with Jesus and one another towards the cross and towards resurrection. In our worship gatherings over the next few weeks, we'll be hearing stories about encounters that people had with Jesus throughout his ministry.

Specifically, we're going to be talking about the "postures" that people came to Jesus with. What did they want from Jesus? How did they approach him or vice versa? What was the posture of their bodies, minds and hearts as they had an encounter with God in the flesh? So often, how we receive the message of Jesus is deeply influenced by how we come to him. I think of the times when I have grumpy days, or I'm stewing about something, and everything my kiddos ask me or every task on my to-do list feels like such an imposition, such an interruption. Or those times in my life when I am on the edge of tears about something, but I'm holding it together. And then someone shows me the slightest bit of compassion, a hint of tenderness, or they go in for a hug, and I just lose it. I'm suddenly a weepy, sappy mess. How does who we are, what we're going

through, what we're longing for shape how we hear the call of Jesus in our lives? These are the questions that we're going to be asking together over Lent.

Roger read for us this morning the story of the rich man. At the opening of this scripture passage, Jesus and his disciples are preparing for a journey. Packing up and getting organized as they set out for a new location for his ministry. As they're engaged in his task, a man comes running up to Jesus, and kneels at the feet of Jesus. The man is sweaty, out of breath. He drops in front of Jesus and says, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life!?"

You know that moment when you've been wrestling with a decision, or have been on the urge of saying something or taking a risk, and then you just say I'm doing it! I'm going to do this thing before I have the chance to talk myself out of it. Several years ago, Taylor and I went camping at a place called Blue Lake, Ontario. One of the features of the area were these rock faces that you could jump off of into the deep water. It was safe, nothing was jutting out, if you jumped you'd land in the water. But the rock faces were HIGH. The water was at least 20 feet from the jump point. I was determined to do the jump, but the feeling of walking to the edge, it's like I couldn't feel my body anymore. Finally, I said to myself, okay, just jump and I felt my feet leave the edge before my thinking brain could stop me. That how I imagine the man in our story, he's been toying with this idea of asking Jesus this question, of joining up with Jesus, or starting something new, something radical in his own life and hears that Jesus is heading out

soon and he thinks it's now or never and he runs to ask Jesus his big question. He needs to hear what Jesus says, he has to know.

Jesus, nonplussed by this sweaty, earnest man in front of him says, "Why do you call me good? Nobody but God is." This is a tricky statement, and I'm still not entirely sure what to make of it. Some commentators suggest that Jesus is reminding his man that he too is human, Jesus knows that what he is about to tell this man is hard; Jesus gets it. Then he lists off the commandments of Moses, the ways to aim yourself towards loving God and loving people; don't kill, cheat, lie, commit adultery, and so on. The Rich man is feeling hopeful, he's done all of that! He's good enough for the kingdom! And he tells Jesus so. Verse 21, "Jesus, looking at him, LOVED him."

This is so important. The hard ask that Jesus is about to deliver to this man is born out of love. Often this passage has been used as a critique of those who have wealth or money, that their abundance of money or possessions renders them undesirable to God. But no, Jesus LOVED him. Here's a man who wants to love and serve God. His status as a wealthy person is not the problem.

Yet it's then that Jesus tells him, "This is the one thing that's holding you back. Go and sell what you own, give all the money to the poor and come and follow me." We can almost hear the colour draining from the young man's face. The verse said he was "shocked." What? Everything? But I've done my best! I've kept all the commandments, Why isn't that good enough!?" The story said he was grieved, and walked away

because he had much to give up, much to lose. Perhaps some of you have felt this, I know I have, “Jesus, isn’t this enough!? Haven’t I given enough?”

The story shifts now to the disciples, who have been watching his whole encounter and I imagine are just as shocked as the rich man. Jesus, this guy wanted to be a part of this, of us! He’d kept the commandments, also his possessions would have been helpful! We could use a wealthy person or two on our team.” Jesus’ response is to tell them how hard it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom. And the still-shocked disciples ask, “Who then can enter?” If not these people who have something to offer you, to offer the ministry, the kingdom!”

Often, I’ve heard chastisement in this story. The story is often framed that way. You’re not good enough for God if you’re not willing to give up everything you have, everything you love. It’s wholehearted devotion or nothing. Yet, we as Christians profess and believe that the Gospel is good news. Can good news be a challenge or hard to hear? Certainly. Yet, I think there is something else going on here.

In preaching, preachers are taught to pay attention to the passages that precede or follow the scripture that you’re preaching on. The context of a given passage within the passage, the chapter or even the whole book matters. What proceeds the story of the rich young man? This story of the man with much to give up?

It’s the story of Jesus gathering the little children to him. Mark 10:13-16 says, “People

were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.”

These three short verses offer us an interpretive key to the Good News of the Gospel offered to the rich man and to us, that Christ calls us not for what we can bring, what we can offer, or even what we're willing to give up. Rather Christ calls us in our NEED. Christ calls us in our LACK. Christ calls us when we have nothing to offer but ourselves. Because it is in our Lack that we are filled with Christ. It's when we show up empty handed, when we show up needy, that the gospel can flow down into our lives. And just like in the children's story today, we can show up with so much in our hands, and in our lives that we can miss the need.

My children continually teach me things about God, usually without knowing they're teaching me. When I first became a parent, it's hard not to think about all you've given up, all I was losing- sleep, time alone, and really, a lot of my identity of who I thought I was or what I felt I was good at. Because the needs of babies are endless. They're utterly helpless, completely dependent on us, their parents, for life, substance and safety. But now, at ages seven and 4, after all these years of developing a relationship, I realize how much I need them. I need their laughter, their words, their wonder, their

curiosity; there's now so much mutuality in our relationship. Recently, the kids had a sleepover at their cousins' home and so Taylor and I were alone in our own home together for the first time in...seven and half years. And how did we spend our time? We commented on how quiet the house was. We showed one another old photos and videos on our phones of the kids as babies and toddlers. It was very sappy.

In the early years of parenting, the journey seemed to be about what I had lost, but now, nearly eight years in, I see how much I've gained. How much more there is to come in my relationships with my kids. Like the rich man, at first I could only see what I was losing, now I see all that I have gained.

In this story, Jesus is asking the rich man to set aside his possessions, not because God wants him (or any of us) to be miserable, but because when we recognize our need for God we can receive all that he offers. We can come to him like the unencumbered children who just want to be with Jesus. The rich man couldn't see how much we would gain with empty hands, he could only see what he might no longer have.

Author CS Lewis put it this way, "It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Once we realize and embrace our lack, empty our hands to receive the life abundant that Jesus promises is it also gives us more compassion for others in our lives. This past week, I was meeting with my therapist. She's also a Christian; a practicing Catholic and she was telling me about a podcast that she listens to that is sermons by a catholic priest. She said that in his sermons he usually calls his congregation, or his audience if you will, Friends. "Welcome friends" "Friends, this is our passage for today" etc, but she noticed that in this particular sermon, he kept calling his audience "fellow sinners".

Her sharing this with me made me think about how we're all lacking, whether we realize it or not. We're all in need of a Savior, all in need of Jesus. From the little children who gathered at the feet of Jesus to the rich man, shocked and grieved as he walked away from Jesus.

So, Fellow Sinners, in this season of Lent, can we realize our need? Can we let go of things in order that we may come empty handed? Can we accept that empty handed is exactly what we need?

In college, I took a Spiritual Formation course. The instructor of that course was Anglican. One of the things she taught us were various prayer "styles" and practices from different branches of Christian

Blessing That Becomes Empty

As It Goes

This blessing

keeps nothing

for itself.

You can find it

by following the path

of what it has let go,

of what it has learned

it can live without.

Say this blessing out loud

a few times

and you will hear

the hollow places

within it,

how it echoes

in a way

that gives your voice

back to you

as if you had never

heard it before.

Yet this blessing

would not be mistaken

for any other,

as if,

in its emptying,

it had lost

what makes it

most itself.

It simply desires

to have room enough

to welcome

what comes.

Today,

it's you.

So come and sit

in this place

made holy

by its hollows.

You think you have

too much to do,

too little time,

too great a weight

of responsibility

that none but you

can carry.

I tell you,

lay it down.

Just for a moment,

if that's what you

can manage at first.

Five minutes.

Lift up your voice—

in laughter,

in weeping,

it does not matter—

and let it ring against

these spacious walls.

Do this

until you can hear

the spaces within

your own breathing.

Do this

until you can feel

the hollow in your heart

where something

is letting go,

where something

is making way