

“Radical Thankfulness”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday October 10, 2021 – Thanksgiving Sunday

Mark 10:17-31

This may seem like a difficult text for Thanksgiving – or a difficult text in general, and it is.

When I read the words of Jesus that the man is to sell all his possessions and give everything away and follow Jesus, I am shocked and grieved – just as the man is.

A long time ago I came across a poem:

Three Dollars Worth of God

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.

Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,

but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk

or a snooze in the sunshine.

I don't want enough of God to make me love a black man

or pick beets with a migrant.

I want ecstasy, not transformation.

I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth.

I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.

— Wilbur Rees

And I'm pretty certain that most of us would like \$3 worth of God – enough to be comfortable and know we are loved, but not enough to change us and transform our world.

But then we look a little closer at our lives, and the world around us, and we long for things to be different, and we wonder why God isn't changing things and people.

And then there's the problem of who God is, God is holy, just, righteous and good.

God is good all the time... all the time God is good.

And that "good" isn't just \$3 good- it is wholly and holy good both.

And we are called to wholly love God, with all our being, not \$3 worth- or an hour on Sunday.

So back to Mark's gospel.

Does Jesus ask everyone to give up their money?

No.

Is this passage about money – not really.

I think that it is pretty clear that Jesus can see the thing or things that we are holding on to that keep us from following him.

He can also see the things that are idols to us, that take the place of God in our lives.

Remember also that Jesus looked at the man and he loved him.

Jesus isn't punishing him, he isn't trying to hurt him, he loves him, and he sees to the heart of the man.

For this man, to be set free to follow Jesus, to live life in the kingdom of God, he needs to let go of his possessions, bless the poor and follow.

And that's the case for many of us.

We, people living in Canada, we, people living a consumer culture are in danger of our possessions owning us.

We are in danger of thinking that our wealth, our possessions, our stuff is going to save us.

When I go to a nursing home, to visit dear friends and family, I am reminded of what is of true and lasting value in our lives.

Mark and I started tithing when I was a student minister- it was easier to start then- because we didn't have much.

We have found that tithing, and giving above that tithe helps to keep our money from grasping us – though it is always still a challenge- at least for me.

I want to go back to the text and point out two other things.

The first is I think the young man who came to Jesus was delusional- he was deceiving himself.

The whole of Jesus' Bible makes it clear that none of us are good.

None of us live holy, whole lives, that are righteous and just.

Not one of us are holy and blameless.

Moses wasn't, Elijah wasn't, Samuel wasn't, Noah wasn't, Sarah wasn't, Deborah wasn't.

Some of the great leaders of God's people, like David, who became King, did many things right, they were righteous, and lived wisely before God, until they didn't.

No one, not one of us, lives holy lives from beginning to end.

The first commandment, the very first commandment of the 10 is:

"You shall have no other gods before me."

There was Jesus, standing before this young man, and Jesus loved him.

In front of him was **the** choice, to leave everything and follow Jesus, or to walk away from life, walk away from eternal life.

He came to Jesus seeking eternal life, and it was offered to him in love.

The man walked away.

My heart breaks for the man.

My heart breaks because treasure that he had, the treasure that he was clinging to was truly nothing of lasting value.

In front of him was life, and treasure beyond his comprehension.

And he walked away.

Along time ago, I said "yes" to Jesus for the first time.

But that "yes" has to be repeated every day.

Lord, yes to following you, yes to *your will* being done, yes to you for how I spend my money, and how I spend my time, and how yes to whatever it is that you are going to ask me, in love, to do.

And "yes" this is impossible, and I will fall, and I won't do what Jesus is calling me to do, and yes sometimes I am just plain selfish, and stubborn, and I want my will and my way.

Sometimes I am afraid to trust God and God's ways.

And then I find myself standing with the disciples saying; Lord, who then can be saved?

In Jesus' response I hear words of promise and hope: "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

And so in Jesus' love I turn again, and say "yes" Lord, and follow.

Last thing, this is Thanksgiving Sunday, one day when we consider how much we have, and see that blessings abound.

What is God calling you to do with those blessings?

I invite you to a moment of prayer... and you might ask God that question.

Lord, what am I to do with all that you have given me?

What must I do to inherit eternal life?

And remember that with God all things are possible. Amen.