

Year B Proper 28 Rocks in the Coconut Mark 10 vv17 to 31

Like last week, this is another tough bit of scripture. As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews says: "Indeed, the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, ...able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before [God] no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account" (Heb.4:12-13).

Jesus' proclamation about wealth today, lays us bare, makes us squirm a little. Like the young man in the story, we all have a lot of possessions. And Jesus says, we must give up those possessions in order to have life with God in God's kingdom. A tough bit of scripture for sure. How do we make sense of this without feeling like we're doomed? Let's find out.

Jesus was setting out on a journey. This journey was, of course, the journey to his death on the cross in Jerusalem. This helps us put this whole story into perspective for us. While it may sound like a big ask for us to give up all our possessions, it certainly isn't more than Jesus asked of himself. It reminds me of a story Victoria Matthews told me. She was the first female bishop in Canada but she struggled with the decision to let her name stand for bishop. She'd be in for a rough ride. Many of the other clergy had a hard enough time swallowing the fact that women were being ordained as priests. They didn't want to be overseen by a woman bishop. Victoria traveled to Scotland on one of her many pilgrimages and as she stood alone a barren moor, she yelled into the wind, "It's a lot to ask of me, you know." And then she had her one and only vision she told me. She saw Jesus, looking down at her from the cross and all he said to her was, "Really?" Jesus gives up everything for the world, even his life.

With that in mind, we run with that young man eagerly up to Jesus and we fall on our knees and we ask him “What are we to do to inherit eternal life?” We are taking the initiative. Life is good but we sense that there is something more we need, something more we need from Jesus. But, why are we on our knees? Throughout the Gospel of Mark, when someone is on their knees before Jesus, it is to ask for healing. We are kneeling before Jesus needing and wanting to be healed. It’s not that we are physically ill. It is a deep, soul-piercing sickness. The brokenness of the world has crept inside and we know that we can only receive true wholeness of body, mind, and spirit, from our relationship with God through Christ.

We know the laws. We’ve been following the laws. Jesus looks on us with love. This is, by the way, the only time in Mark, that Jesus is said to look on someone with love. So, with love for us, Jesus drops a bombshell. You are right, he tells us. There is more to life than following laws. Laws don’t change your heart, he says. And you are right, he tells us. You need healing from the brokenness of this world and you will find wholeness in relationship with me, he says. This relationship, he goes on, this relationship with me requires more than just following rules. If you want to live in eternal life, he says, I require your whole self.

Oh...this sounds serious, we think. Yup...here it comes: “go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor,” Jesus instructs us, “and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” Earlier this year, I heard Jay tell a story in a sermon about the fascinating way in which people in other countries capture monkeys. They put a small whole in a coconut and empty it out. They place a few stones in the coconut and tie a string to it. The monkey puts its hand into the coconut and grasps the stones. A clenched fist will not fit back out the small hole. The person then pulls on the string to get the monkey. The monkey could easily get away if he would just

let go of the stones. But thinking he has something valuable, the monkey holds on and is captured.

We all hold onto some stones in the coconut and are snared by the world. It is not just possessions that we are grasping onto. Notice that Jesus does not simply ask the young man to give up his possessions. Jesus does not ask us to live lives of deprivation. In fact, just a short while after the young man leaves, Jesus assures us that God will give to us everything we could possibly need.

Jesus' primary call is not to a life of poverty but to a life of discipleship. The young man is asked to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. This is the redistribution of wealth. The man is being asked to participate in economic justice. But, not just that, the man – and we, too – are asked to change our relationship with the poor, to help them and to identify with them, to be among them and look on them with the same love with which Jesus looks at us. With that young man, we are asked to turn our backs on the power and status that our possessions give to us. Possessions are not called “status symbols” for nothing. Whether we admit it or not, every single one of us has our hand stuck in the coconut, holding the stones of the world's idea of power – position, property, and pocket-book. Can we let go? This is hard stuff to let go of. Can we let go of the idea that a successful person is the one with the good paying job? The one who has it all? That a successful church is a large, wealthy church? Can we let go of thinking that there will always be poor people and rich people? That there will always be conflict? That the goal in life will always be to work, work, work to get ahead? Can we let go of the world's idea of power and greatness and embrace God's way of true power and greatness?

We stand with one foot in the world's kingdom and one foot in God's kingdom and it is really hard to yank that foot out of the world's kingdom, to let go of our

attachment to the world's ways of thinking. Jesus knows that we won't be perfect in our efforts. No one is completely and wholly good except God, he tells us. We must continuously work at letting go of the world's way of viewing power and greatness, continuously work at turning ourselves toward God's ways. We do this for the sake of the good news, Jesus says. What is the good news? The good news is the very first words we hear out of Jesus' mouth in the Gospel according to Mark: "The time is fulfilled," he cried out. "The kingdom of God is at hand." As I've said before, the kingdom of God (heaven) is not some far away place in our space and time. "God's space and ours interlock and intersect in a whole variety of ways even while they retain, for the moment at least, their separate and distinct identities and roles. One day,...they will be joined in a quite new way, open and visible to one another, married together forever" (p.116 of *Surprised By Hope*). The fulness of God's kingdom surrounds us and, as more and more people yank that foot out of the world's kingdom, the fulness of God's kingdom is revealed more and more on earth as in heaven. That is good news indeed.

It won't be easy, Jesus tells us. When we push against the powers of the world, the powers of the world push back. There will be persecutions. Families will be divided. Friends will be lost. But we will gain so much more...we will gain God's house – the church – our brothers and sisters in Christ, together as children of God we will have everything we need. It will be hard work but all things are possible with God, Jesus assures us. All things are possible when we let go of the world and trust completely in God, like the old widow who put her last two pennies on the offering plate, when we trust completely that God will give us this day our daily bread – we don't need to stockpile – when we trust completely in God we will have eternal life – that is, life with God in God's kingdom now. So, let's let go of our rocks and enter into the kingdom with both feet.