

The Reverend Kathy Boss  
All Saints' Episcopal Church, Littleton, NH  
Sermon  
October 10, 2021  
Proper 23, Track 2, Year B  
"A Rich Man's Grief"

[Amos 5:6-7,10-15](#)

[Psalms 90:12-17](#)

[Hebrews 4:12-16](#)

[Mark 10:17-31](#)

Well, Mark certainly does not go easy on us does he.

Our Gospel passage from today is hard to hear, especially in a culture where belonging is often about belongings, a country that is the wealthiest in the world, and the Christian denomination with the highest per capita income. And so we find ways to manage the message:

- Jesus is being rhetorical, calling our bluff. It's not actually about giving all of our stuff to the poor.
- The command was particular to that young man at that time.
- It isn't really up to us, it's up to God, so we're off the hook.
- We're trying our hardest, like Peter. That counts for something.

This young man is gobsmacked by Jesus's message. There is not time, at least in the context of this scene, for him to manage anything.

He runs up to Jesus, probably followed by a retinue of servants and friends, and falls, kneeling at Jesus's feet. This deeply heartfelt gesture is typical of one who desires healing. The young man has done the right things and yet there is something for him that is not right, something that needs healing. It is not well with his soul.

“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

The first part of Jesus’s lesson to the young man--that goodness lies in God, and God alone--does not shake the man. He can see that. He stands corrected, drops the word “Good” the next time he addresses Jesus, humbled, and yet excited that he has kept the commandments that Jesus has reiterated.

And in that moment “Jesus looking at him, loved him.” “Jesus looking at him, loved him.” So what he spoke next, Mark lets us know, is spoken with love. It is a remarkable moment--the only moment in Mark where Jesus is said to have loved someone.

Here is this young rich man surrounded by his retinue and attired in fine cloth and he has thrown himself before Jesus, before God. Humbled himself faithfully in a prayer for healing even unto his soul--to make himself right with God. He knows already that keeping the laws has not been enough.

And, Jesus loves him.

Often the hardest asks are of those we love.

“You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

Some of the hardest words in the Bible. Words that have led to monastic life, and to a bevy of rationales why we don’t have to give it *all* away.

But it is the response of the young man that I find most interesting, and that we so often judge--“When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.”

So many of us read this and assume that this shock and grief means that he goes away and does nothing. But I would argue that it is exactly his shock

and grief that show he is serious about following Jesus--that his shock and grief show that rather than managing Jesus's message, finding a way around it, interpreting it through his own lens, he has taken it to heart.

So much of what we have heard from Mark's Gospel about following Jesus is about letting go--Letting go of our preconceptions of what a messiah should be ("Get Thee Behind me Satan"); letting go of privileges like the ability to easily divorce; letting go of exclusivity and the idea that you are the only ones who have the go ahead to do God's work; letting go of being greater than."

When we truly let go of a deeply embedded ideology, a thought pattern, or a way of being and having in this world, a deeply appropriate response is grief. When we learn that this is what we must do, it is not unseemly or unusual to be shocked. If we are not, it is likely we are not digging deeply enough.

"When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions."

I had a doll when I was a young teen--she wasn't a baby doll, she was a display doll. Ugly as sin, if I am honest, looking back on it--square head, belle dress, big eyes with little white swirls in them to make them look shiny. But I had to give her up. We were moving, selling almost everything we owned so we could travel across country on a big adventure. I was furious and indignant.

It was not until much later in life that I allowed the grief of that moment, the shock of it to surface. And it was only then that I was able to transform it into service to God, to compassion and love for others.

I believe that that young rich man was sincere, that his grief and shock show his commitment, not his lack of it. He does not respond with excuses.

He does not respond with indignation. He does not respond with denial. He does not manage Jesus's message, he takes it to heart, feels it's weight, it's gravity, and grieves knowing that what he must do is going to be very, very hard, "for he had many possessions." It would have been hard work for him, but he knows at the foundation of things that Jesus loves him, and God is good.

So, what I would encourage you today, is to listen to what God is telling you when you fall at Jesus's feet to ask for healing--where are you hearing God and responding with indignation or excuses, where do you find yourself pushing away shock or grief at something God demands of you and instead managing it.

Can you, instead allow yourself to be shocked at what Jesus is asking of you, to let yourself grieve, to feel the deep set feeling that letting go demands of you, to look at what you have to let go and see the abundance of it, and still turn your back on it and follow. Jesus loves you and God is good.