

Year B Proper 23, 2015
October 11, 2015
Mark 10:17-31
The Reverend Ben Badgett

My son Edward and I had the privilege of eating breakfast with the Brotherhood of St Andrew yesterday. And there was a wonderful moment when we all learned that the age range of all of us gathered ran the spectrum of 94 years. Later that afternoon I officiated a wedding, and I began to feel like I was living that hit song, "100 Years." A song which recaps all of life's epic moments decade by decade – and how in the blink of an eye the time flies.

I trust that we all have experienced a day that feels like a lifetime and a lifetime that feels like a day. Moments when a minute feels like an hour and an hour feels like a minute. In these moments it is often the company we keep that determines the perceived passing of time.

The question, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" that comes to Jesus today is a question that has pervaded all of history and transcends into all of the future. The question, inherently, has two facets to it: 1. Time (eternity) and 2. Life.

How do we transcend the issue of time? We all must die, but surely there is more than the finite experience we have in this body and in this place.

How do we conquer death? – Not just of the body, but of all that robs us of life (i.e. broken relationships, fear, doubt, hate, oppression, etc.)?

"What must I (we) do to inherit eternal life?" The unnamed man in the story asks this question on behalf of all of us.

Jesus begins his response with familiarity. Jesus begins to respond by finding common ground with the man asking this question. Jesus responds by citing commandments that the man knew and lived already. Jesus "met him where he was," so to speak. But Jesus did not want him to stay there – the gospel says, "Jesus ... loved him." The man was invited into a deeper understanding of both eternity and life.

This invitation to go deeper is one that, like with the man, many are not ready to accept. The invitation to go deeper involves loss before it involves gain. But this deeper understanding of life is in fact nothing new under the sun. And, in truth, this deeper understanding takes us back to the beginning (the beginning of time).

Many of us are presently embarking on a journey of discovering the Sabbath in our small group studies. The Sabbath, a gift from the beginning of creation, brings to the fore the heart of today's lesson: God is the source and sustainer of life, the beginning and ending of time.

Sabbath celebrates life that originates in God and flows through God. A day in which we release our control is a day in which we say in heart, mind, body and soul that God has provided and that God will provide. Our world of self-determination and self-gratification is suspended in order that we celebrate what is only possible with God: Life and Eternity.

But first we must dispossess. We must remember that it is not what we have that determines who we are. The very first step in dispossessing is in clearing the external in order to discover the internal. We must know who we are apart from what others say, or the work we do, or the materials we own. ***We must enter the holy of holies of our soul*** – we must recall that, at our creation, God spoke and proclaimed, “Very Good.”

Before we could prove ourselves, before we conquered knowledge, built civilizations or invented iPhones, God loved us and wanted us for himself.

If we are to dispossess the external, we must first lay claim to our only true possession – our identity. If we do not know and believe ourselves to be beloved by God, then we have no hope for finding eternal life when all else turns to dust.

So, when Jesus presses the issue further, by bringing the camel up to the eye of the needle, he gives no other option. What is impossible for mortals is only possible for God. In case we still think we can follow enough rules or muster our own cleverness to get through – forget it. It's not about you, and it's not about me! Jesus tells us.

And so, the invitation to follow Jesus becomes life-changing and ego-shattering.

We begin to peel the layers back in our lives and we are left not with money or fame or work, but with the beauty and fragility of one who was created through no effort of our own.

At the heart of today's gospel lesson is the acceptance of God's unconditional love for us. And with that acceptance is the faith that God's love for us is greater than any love or possession we can generate for ourselves.

And so, the question then becomes, “Is God's love enough?” Do we fear that we will be without if we do not earn our keep or prove ourselves worthy?

At the end of the day, we realize that inheriting eternal life is a lifelong struggle – it's a journey. We realize that daily we fight the battle of wanting to love ourselves out of fear that God may not love us. Or wanting to love ourselves because we don't trust others to love us sufficiently.

And so the wrestling match continues. Our grip is tight, yet Jesus says, "loosen up. Let it go, and walk with me. You may not know what lies ahead, but you can trust that you won't be alone. I was with you in the beginning and I will be with you in the end and beyond."

Eternal life blossomed at creation, includes this moment, and unfolds in all the moments to come. The company we keep within ourselves, with God and with one another reveals to us all the Life that makes up eternity.

So, let us take a deep breath, rest, and discover anew what is only possible with God.

Amen.