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Mark 10:17-27

Let’s Get Real

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Mark 10:17-27 Common English Bible

As Jesus continued down the road, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to obtain eternal life?” Jesus replied, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except the one God. You know the commandments: Don’t commit murder. Don’t commit adultery. Don’t steal. Don’t give false testimony. Don’t cheat. Honor your father and mother.” “Teacher,” he responded, “I’ve kept all of these things since I was a boy.” Jesus looked at him carefully and loved him. He said, “You are lacking one thing. Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me.” But the man was dismayed at this statement and went away saddened, because he had many possessions.

Looking around, Jesus said to his disciples, “It will be very hard for the wealthy to enter God’s kingdom!” His words startled the disciples, so Jesus told them again, “Children, it’s difficult to enter God’s kingdom! It’s easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God’s kingdom.”

They were shocked even more and said to each other, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them carefully and said, “It’s impossible with human beings, but not with God. All things are possible for God.”

I remember in high school being in a Bible Study at church about Jesus coming back. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5 that the Lord will come like a thief in the night. So, I used to think that if I thought Jesus was coming back, then Jesus couldn’t come back because Matthew’s Gospel says that no one will know the day or the hour. So, I thought that I could outsmart Jesus.

I think that is what the young man in our scripture today is doing. What do I have to do to obtain eternal life? What rule do I have to follow? What words do I have to say? What do I have to believe? What do I have to reveal about myself? Jesus says**,** “There’s one thing left: Go sell whatever you own and give it to the poor. All your wealth will then be heavenly wealth. And come follow me.” But the man can’t do it because he was holding on tight to a lot of things and not about to let go (The Message translation).

What must we do to obtain eternal life? We can assume that the young man who comes to Jesus is doing okay financially. His mortgage is paid off, his stock portfolio is solid and he is blessed in the ways that the world values. Now he wants to make sure he will obtain eternal life. He is a good rule follower, but he is really only interested in himself. He misses the point of what Jesus is all about. Yesterday as I was sitting at my 9-year old son’s basketball game I thought, this it like a real basketball game. They were passing to each other and attempting lay-ups and actually making baskets. I remembered what the basketball games were like in his first season. Each player just wanted the ball. They didn’t pass, they weren’t sure what a lay-up was, and the basket was just a little too high for their throws to reach. They were not able to keep their eyes on the entire court, they were only focused on themselves. They needed to keep their eyes up. In their first season they could not do it. At the game yesterday they were doing it!

The man in our scripture needs to keep his eyes up. Just like the basketball players who are playing their first season, he cannot see the whole picture. He only sees himself. The man can’t earn God’s love and he can’t buy it. God is in control. That is not an easy concept for us type A people to get. I think that realization is the first step in getting real, accepting the fact that we are not in control. If we can keep our eyes up and see the entire court, then we can see everyone around us so we don’t miss what God wants us to see. The man in our scripture was not able to see beyond his own needs. He wants a magic potion that will assure he will be saved. Here, drink this and you will be saved. Jesus does not provide that magic elixir.

Did you notice the commandments that Jesus lists in our scripture? Don’t commit murder, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal, don’t lie, don’t cheat, honor your father and mother. When children learn about the 10 commandments in Sunday School we say that the first 4 are about our relationship with God, have no other gods, no idols, don’t take the Lord’s name in vain, and keep the Sabbath day holy. Then the next 6 are all about how we are in relationship with other people. They are the ones that Jesus lists. Honor your father and mother, don’t murder, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal, don’t bear false witness, don’t covet. They are all about others. Eternal life is connected to what we do for others. It is tied to justice.

Do we notice those around us? Do we notice injustice around us? Does the injustice that we see make us lose sleep? This week I had a meeting in Oklahoma City and I was able to visit the Oklahoma City National Memorial. It was one of the most moving things I have ever seen. As I walked under the gate, I could see the time. It said 9:01. And there was a large reflecting pool and then another gate that said the time of 9:03. The gates frame the moment of destruction which was 9:02. The explanation said that the 9:01 gate represents the innocence of the city before the attack. The 9:03 gate represents the moment that we all changed forever, and the hope that came from the horror in the moments and days after the bombing. After 9:03 there was hope.

There were two churches nearby, the United Methodist Church and a Catholic Church. The stained glass windows of the Methodist Church were blown out but the face of the Jesus’ head from the Good Shepherd window was found intact in the rubble. A new stained glass window was made out of the broken pieces of the original windows and below the window are these words, “The Lord takes broken pieces, and by His Love makes us whole.” At the Catholic Church the pipes from the pipe organ fell on the pews and the explosion raised the roof several inches off its steel pillars. The tabernacle candle which is a light lamp on the altar remained lit throughout the blast.

Behind the Catholic Church is a statue of Jesus called “And Jesus Wept.” Jesus’ head is bowed, his back is to the Memorial, and his right hand is over his face. Jesus is weeping and turning away from the destruction. He stands facing a wall that has 168 niches in it representing the 168 people killed that day including 19 children.

Death is hard and it hurts. Injustice is hard and it hurts. When Jesus heard about the death of his friend Lazarus, he stopped to weep. We are called to feel other people’s pain. Being real means we acknowledge what is not right about us. It means giving voice to what is not right about our world. And when you can’t fix it, you sit with the pain of it. Yes, the man in our scripture was following the letter of the law, but he wasn’t following the spirit of it. He was not being real.

I am reminded of the young man who murdered nine people at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. This week we saw him being sentenced to death for his actions. He showed no remorse for his actions. We cannot fathom how this young man could kill innocent people, people who had never harmed him in any way, and not feel remorse for his actions. His reaction did not seem real.

We often focus on Jesus’ words to the man in our scripture, sell what you own and give the money to the poor. And it seems like something that we definitely do not want to do. Jesus is asking him to be a steward of the world, to be a steward of God’s people.

The disciples wonder who can be saved? It seems impossible, it’s easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God’s kingdom. It is entirely possible to give up everything for God, and still not have the heart that we need to enter into the presence of God. In 1st Corinthians 13 the Apostle Paul says, “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

Blackish is a comedy TV show on ABC that is really poignant. This week’s episode was about America and our future. The daughter on the show, Zoey, decides to make lemonade for her school’s healing rally. She says, “It’s not liberal lemonade. It’s not conservative lemonade. It’s just lemonade that I made with love. That’s what I want my contribution to be — love.”

It reminds me of President Obama’s speech where he said we should not have red states and blue states but the United States of America. I noticed this week after President Obama’s farewell address that my Facebook feed was horribly split between those people who thought it was the best thing they had ever heard and those who could not wait for President Obama’s tenure to end. Love is hard to find with such division. Finding common ground seems almost impossible. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., “Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.” To love you have to be real.

As we continue to think about getting real with one another, may we remember that there is pain in every one of our stories. In this place we are called to be a real church for real people with real problems. To love, you have to be real. To do good well, you have to be real. And we can’t be effective at doing justice without being real. May we all remember the words of Micah 6:8, “God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Amen.