

Sermon for Sunday, October 7, 2018 - "Help with Dis-ease"

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

October 7, 2018

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Decorah, Iowa

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[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

A man comes to Jesus and says, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

When we hear that, we're conditioned to think about an afterlife, about a place called heaven complete with St. Peter and the pearly gates.

We take this story as some kind of entrance exam about who's gonna get past those pearly gates. This rich guy clearly fails.

So, what does that mean for us? Do we have to give everything away to pass the test?

Very few people in history have actually done that - have they all failed the entrance exam? Probably not.

So, maybe, this was just this guys' specific test and it doesn't apply to us?

Or maybe Jesus doesn't really mean sell everything, just make sure to be generous?

Or maybe Jesus is trying to show us that we really need Jesus to get into heaven?

Actually, this story isn't about getting past those pearly gates at all. It isn't about somewhere we'll go after we die. Throughout the gospels, when Jesus talked about eternal life he was talking about experiencing abundant life in relationship with God now and forever. When Jesus talked about the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven, he was talking about life on earth being as God intends it.

God intends for us to know peace and well-being and harmony with each other and God. When that happens, we experience the eternal, abundant life God wants for us.

It seems this man was not experiencing that well-being. He came to Jesus and knelt before him. His posture is the same posture used by everyone who comes to Jesus asking for healing in the Gospel of Mark. They kneel and plead for the thing that they are missing.

It seems this rich man has a sense of dis-ease with his life. Something is missing and he longs to know how he can be healed and experience eternal, abundant life with God.

Jesus looks at him with compassion and sees his problem. It is his wealth. Jesus doesn't spell out how wealth is causing the problem but we can probably guess. Wealth can trick us into thinking that we are self-made people who have earned or deserved every good thing that happens to us.

- In Jesus' time people believed that wealth was a sign of divine blessing, that it meant you were righteous and worthy of God's favor.
- In our day, we still often understand some relative measure of wealth to be sign that we are virtuous and have a good, strong work ethic and deserve what we have earned.

Wealth can mask our true dependence on God and one another. As scripture tells us, it is “not good” for us to be alone - we need to be in **relationships of mutual dependence** with one another. Yet, wealth can lead us to think we’re fine on our own. We can get focused on how to protect and increase what we have earned rather than gratefully receiving and passing on what God has graciously given.

Perhaps this was what was happening for the rich man:

- He had acquired many possessions.
- He had kept the letter of the law.
- He had brought his kids to Sunday School and served on the church committees and done everything he was supposed to do.
- And still something was missing.

He went to Jesus in his dis-ease, seeking a prescription. And Jesus told him something that shocked him - you are lacking one thing so give everything you have away. What? If he was lacking one thing, why give everything away?

- Wasn’t there one more thing he could do, one more thing that would assure him of God’s blessing and relieve his sense that something was missing?
- Isn’t there some self-help book or app that could help us?

No, Jesus said to this rich man, let go of it all and give to the poor. Let go of the illusion that you can do, earn, achieve or buy your way to happiness. Stop looking to external signs of God’s favor and trust in God alone. Happiness, joy, and well-being will come as you give your money away and discover your interdependence and connection to the poor and all God’s people.

There is great wisdom for each of us here as well. Both wealth and concerns about money can separate us from God and one another and from the joy and well-being God longs for us to know.

We don’t know what Jesus would tell each of us individually if we were to kneel before him seeking help for our own dis-eases and our own issues with money. Would he tell us to sell all we have and give everything away? Probably not. He gave this extreme advice to just one person. He called some people to leave everything, including possessions and family, to follow him; but he also relied on the hospitality and wealth of many people.

The callings and the healing given to Christians throughout the ages have been as varied as those in scripture. Some of us have been called to leave everything. Many more of us have been called to give abundantly to others so that we might truly know our dependence on God and our connection to one another.

We are all encouraged to ask: What role do money and wealth play in our lives? Have we bought into the narrative that we can buy our own happiness - that what we really need to be satisfied is just a purchase away? Are we consumed by worries about money or do we live with guilt about how much we have? Do we live isolated from almost two thirds of the people in this world who live in poverty or have we realized our interconnectedness with them?

These are the kinds of questions Jesus asks of us. They are the things we need to consider together: Together, let’s let go of the illusion that we can “do”, earn, achieve or buy our way to abundant life. Let’s stop looking for external signs for God’s favor and trust in God alone. Let’s stop living isolated from God and others thinking we are just fine on our own. Let’s give some significant percentage of our money away.

Well-being will come as we give and discover our interdependence and connection to the poor and all God's people.

This may feel overwhelming, even impossible; but with God all things are possible. God gives us abundant gifts, mercy, forgiveness and healing. God gives us eternal, abundant life in Christ Jesus. We can trust, receive and give freely of what we have first been given.

Thanks be to God