

October 11, 2009

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It seems more and more, people are longing for a simple lifestyle. The current economic situation has given most of us a reason to pause, re-evaluate, and turn away from the rabid consumerism that almost swallowed us whole. A few years ago, people adopted the mantra "MORE" and its partners, "BIGGER, BETTER and COOLER." We assumed nothing but the best would do, and there would be no stopping our march toward the ultimate.

The young man in today's gospel approached Jesus to talk to him about salvation. In his faith tradition, the man sees his wealth as a way to perform his religious duties, a blessing from God for being obedient. Wealth will buy him salvation. Wealth will clear his conscious of any unfairness he may have carried out in his well to do life. Yet Jesus doesn't ask him to buy his discipleship. He doesn't ask for a fancy gift. Jesus asks the man to leave behind what he knows and follow him. Jesus is asking the man to leave behind his wealth and take up a lifestyle that does not require an accumulation of goods, but an engagement with people. It is not an acquisition of stuff Jesus requests but the very real substances of blood, sweat and tears.

When we baptize a child here, or feed the hungry here or visit the sick who cannot be with us here, we are embracing this new lifestyle.

We are told the young man runs up to Jesus and kneels before him, expressing an enthusiasm to follow Jesus. But when he learns the commitment, the choices he must make, he leaves saddened and we think what a foolish choice he has made. Then we go out and buy a new i-phone on a nearly maxed out credit card, or buy a new winter jacket because, while last year's is still perfectly fine, it's not the right length. It is a common mistake not to identify with this man because we, as a country, forget that we still live in one of the wealthiest nations in the world. We tend to think of the "rich" as that top 1 %, the Bill Gates of the world. Our standard of living is higher than 95% of people around the globe. That 95% is the middle class, that battered and bruised group of families and individuals, is still wealthier than 95% of other Christians, other human beings, living on this planet.

As far back as the Garden of Eden story, we long for things we don't have and rally don't need. Seldom does it occur to us that MORE usually doesn't lead to any long-term satisfaction. Unfortunately, a lot of times we pray so that God will be on our side to give us what we want, what we think we need. Thankfully, in His love, God often denies us so we can cultivate the spirit of detachment instead of materialism.

The young man in today's gospel yearns for something he knows Jesus can give, but he doesn't realize the life Jesus will ask him to live is not a life characterized by what he has, but by what he has done. This man lived all his life following the 10 Commandments, as we do. Have you ever noticed that the 10 Commandments tell us what we **SHOULDN'T** do to others? We expect people to avoid killing others, stealing from others, lying or defrauding others. And this young man didn't do any of those things, he tells Jesus. He hasn't done anything bad to people, but he didn't do anything good either. He didn't do anything to make the lives of the poor better. This is the new teaching Jesus gives to this man and to us today.

The practice of simplicity isn't easy. It's like pruning a tree, some things need to be cut away and it can be painful. But in the long run, this practice enables us to live a life filled with peace. So, the way to God is to sell everything, live in a cave and wear a sackcloth, right? Well, it's pretty cold in caves this time of the year, and I don't know about you, but I look terrible in a sackcloth. Even St. Francis in all of his austerity, conceded that his life was not for everyone and his followers were not to berate those who were well off.

No, I think Jesus is looking for spiritual fruits, not religious nuts. Jesus has simply asked us to follow him. This morning in Hebrews, we are told that Jesus is the one human that was tempted just as we are, but is still without sin. He knows it's rough out there. But he is also the one who can give peace in here.

I truly believe as a community, we can be responsible for peace in our little corner of the world and it does not matter what your bank account total is, what title you have at work, what school you went to. We can bring about peace simply by being an example of Christ in our little part of the universe.

In the early 90's, in East LA, gangs had overrun neighborhoods and the killings were a daily event as the members fought over turf. A group of mothers in one particularly violent area met every week to read their bibles and pray for a solution. They had come up with a simple idea, one which many in the group were not too sure about. Even with their trepidation one evening, 70 women walked from one gang turf to another carrying not money, not weapons, but salsa, chips and soda. The action of these women was unexpected, disarming and simple. They had broken the rules. The rules were anger, violence and pain to gain more turf, more stuff, more, more, more. They continued these pilgrimages every night. The gang violence dropped significantly. Relationships were formed and transformed. Over time, these women and former gang members built up a tortilla factory, bakery, child care center, and a school offering job training and jobs. They even formed a neighborhood watch group.

A simple thing, stepping away from fear, re-examining our perspective and changing it to make our neighborhood a better place. But oh, the anxiety we feel to take that step. Would it help you to realize that Jesus is in our corner? He has made his invitation clear; leave behind what you think you need, what you think you know and follow me. I will be here for you. Simple living brings with it a new set of values; not the kind that hang over your head like a cloud. It brings us an understanding that our choices today to fulfill our needs will impact generations to come. How will it change our choices today if we think about how it will affect our children or grandchildren tomorrow?

There is a Shaker hymn that was written in 1848 I'd like to finish with here.

"Tis a gift to be simple, tis a gift to be free. Tis a gift to come down where we ought to be. And when we find ourselves in the place just right, twill be in the valley of love and delight." That's the silver lining in these dark times. If we turn ourselves around, turn our thinking to the way Jesus invited us to be, we may find ourselves in the valley of love and delight.

Amen+