

Let go

Mark 10:17-31

October 11, 2015

Is it easy? Is it easy to enter the kingdom of God?

Oh, yes! It is easy, so very easy! This is the seed of hope that is planted in each of you, that it is easy, that you do not have to do anything at all to enter the kingdom of God. Except let go.

So it's hard, isn't it? It's so very hard to enter the kingdom of God, because it means you have to let go. Will you?

That's where we ended last Sunday, with this invitation. Will you? So, did you? Did you let go? Is it fair for me to ask? Or are we not expected to actually do something about the teaching that we hear? Are we not expected to actually change something about our lives in response to a sermon or in response to a clear word from God?

Yeah, I know I should let go. I think about it a lot. I am working on it, struggling with it, praying about it.

I don't want to know if you're thinking about it or working on it or praying about it. I want to know if you did it! Either you did or you didn't. So, did you? Did you let go?

We still need to talk about it, don't we?

He didn't. It was so very hard for him to let go and he didn't. I'm talking about the man who came to Jesus asking about eternal life. We often remember him as the "rich young ruler" but only Luke calls him a ruler and only Matthew says he is young. Matthew may have confused Mark's original story because Mark reports that the man said to Jesus: "Ever since I was young, I have obeyed all these commandments."

What is clear in Mark's telling of the story is that the man, however old he is and whatever position in society he enjoys, is rich, and that Jesus loves him. Jesus loves him, just because. Because he is trying, because he has done his best to do what God requires, because he is sincere, because he is eager to know what he must do to receive eternal life, but, mostly, just because. And because Jesus loves him, Jesus gives the man the answer he seeks. He tells him how to receive eternal life. He tells him how to live now in the present a life that is eternal, and that is ... let go.

And because Jesus loves you, Jesus tells you what you must do to receive eternal life. Let go!

But he didn't. You see, he was very rich. It wasn't that he couldn't let go, but that he didn't. He chose not to let go. He chose wealth ... over eternal life. He chose wealth over eternal life! And he went away sad.

Would you rather be rich and sad, or poor and joyful? It's a fair question, because it may come to that for you.

The disciples were scandalized: "Then who can be saved?" If a wealthy man, enjoying every advantage, following every rule, seeking eternal life with a sincere heart cannot enter the kingdom of God, then who can?

They thought it was a good question because they bought into the belief that just about all of us buy into, that wealthy people can pretty much get whatever they want and do whatever they want. They believed like many of us believe that money is the key to success and to fulfillment and even to happiness.

And even, they might say, to a fast track to eternal life, because having money frees you from preoccupation with mere survival. Having money frees you from having to spend so much time and energy and passion on mundane matters. Having money frees you to pay attention to spiritual things and gives you the resources to be generous and merciful and kind. So if this man, having every advantage, cannot enter the kingdom of God, then they don't stand a chance.

But what seems from our point of view to be an advantage is from Jesus' point of view a disadvantage.

How hard it will be for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God! ... Many who are now first will be last, and many who are now last will be first.

Jesus never said this rich man cannot enter the kingdom of God. He said it will be hard, very hard.

It's hard. It's so very hard for him and so very hard for us, because we cling to the things we believe we need to feel secure, to be fulfilled, to live a good life, to be happy, money among these things, money perhaps foremost among these things.

We cling because? Because we do not trust God. Because we do not trust in the promise. If you did, if you did trust in the promise, you could let go, couldn't you?

So it is easy. And that is the good news, the seed of hope that is planted in each of you today. It is easy. You don't need money. You don't need money to be happy. You don't need money to live a good life. You don't need money to be saved. You don't need money to enter the kingdom of God. Anybody can do it! You just have to let go and trust in the promise.

Anybody can do it, but not everybody does. Because it is so very hard for us to let go, and it may even seem impossible. But what is impossible for us is possible for God. Everything is possible for God. Trust in the promise.

Trust in the promise.