

**“All of It”  
Mark 10:17-22**

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<sup>17</sup> As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ <sup>18</sup> Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: “You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.”’ <sup>20</sup> He said to him, ‘Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.’ <sup>21</sup> Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ <sup>22</sup> When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

<sup>23</sup> Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’ <sup>24</sup> And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’ <sup>26</sup> They were greatly astounded and said to one another, ‘Then who can be saved?’ <sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.’

<sup>28</sup> Peter began to say to him, ‘Look, we have left everything and followed you.’ <sup>29</sup> Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, <sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.’

When I was a boy, my grandmother told me to finish my dinner. “There are hungry children in Africa who would love to eat that food,” she said. My response as a child was simple. Why can’t we just send this food to Africa? Make it happen!

I didn’t think about it at the time, but later realized that I could have made the case that my grandmother’s pot roast was so dry and chewy that the kids in Africa would probably find a way to send it back.

Instead, I suggested that we box it up right this minute and get it in the mail. This introduces an interesting dynamic to the conversation. The adult hears: “Well, *what are we currently doing* about getting food to Africa anyway?” Suddenly the tables are turned. The problem of getting me to eat my dinner is now met with the problem of explaining to me why sending partially eaten pot roast to Africa is logistically unfeasible. (And, more importantly, with the nagging problem of why we haven’t been concerned about hungry African children before now!)

But see, children don't think about what's feasible or unfeasible in a situation like this, which is one of the reasons that mentioning starving people throughout the world should never be used as leverage against a child who won't eat his or her food.

One of the other reasons, I think, is that as adults, we want to be careful about the connections we help our children make between the pain and suffering of others and a sense of appreciation for what we *do* have. Isn't what the "starving children in Africa" line is supposed to accomplish at the dinner table? Make the child appreciate the food in front of him or her? And isn't that crazy??? Crazy to say to a child: "There are children starving to death in this world! Starving! They won't make it through the night they're so hungry... Now, ENJOY YOUR SUPPER! And if you finish, you get dessert."

I bring all this up to simply say that I think we often have a strange way of thinking about wealth and poverty in our world. It might be easy to talk about it from an abstract point of view, but when it gets personal, we tend to get uncomfortable—when the conversation about "starving children in Africa" truly does turn to the food in front of us, and we recognize our relative wealth, we tend to get uncomfortable.

This is a little bit of what's going on in our passage from Mark's gospel this morning. A man runs up and kneels before Jesus, and asks him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And almost right away, we get the sense that this guy can't wait to hear the good news that he's doing a splendid job.

Jesus says to him, "You know the commandments. Keep the commandments!"

And we know what the man is thinking. He's saying to himself: "This is my moment! And it has *all paid off!* I've worshipped, I've studied the Scriptures, I've led a holy life, I've kept the commandments, I've sacrificed, I've honored the Sabbath, I've tithed my 10%, I've done it all!"

And now, thanks to his diligent good work, he is able to kneel before Jesus and say, "Teacher, I have kept all the commandments since my youth!"

This is the shining moment the man's been dreaming about. That moment when, at the feet of the Messiah, he gets a gold star on his report card and is assured that his religious commitments have paid off...

But then it all falls apart.

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'

The rich man goes away from Jesus grieving because, well, he's rich. He's got a lot of stuff, and Jesus' suggestion that he go and sell it all and give it to the poor is simply too much for him to bear.

And I wonder what he thought as he walked away: “I came to talk about my faith, Jesus—not my money. I thought this was about what I believe, not what I own...”

And I feel for the guy. We all feel for the guy, don’t we? After all, we kind of get where he’s coming from. I mean, I can talk all day long about my faith, about being a Christian and a Presbyterian, about reading the Bible, about the gospels... (Don’t worry, I’m not going to talk all day.) But we *could* talk all day about issues of faith and belief—about predestination, about those other fascinating theological concepts: the mystery of the Trinity and the nature of Jesus as both fully human and fully God. We could talk forever about Heaven and Hell and salvation, and “Why do bad things happen to good people?”

We could talk all day long about our faith, but once the subject of our own money comes up, we get uncomfortably quiet.

A story about a meeting at a church: A very wealthy man stood up to tell the rest of those present about his Christian Faith. "I'm a millionaire," he said, "and I attribute my wealth to the blessings of God in my life."

He went on to recall the turning point of his faith: As a young man he had just earned his first dollar, and he went to a church meeting that night. At that meeting, a missionary from overseas was there to discuss his work. Afterwards, an offering was collected to support the work of this missionary, and the wealthy man knew that he would either have to give it all to God or nothing at all.

So at that moment he decided to give all that he had to God. *Looking back*, he knew that God had blessed that decision and had made him wealthy. When he had finished there was an awed silence. As he moved to his seat and sat down a little old lady leaned over to him and said: "*I dare you to do it again.*"

Jesus says to the rich man, in effect: Thank you for your faith. Thank you for your obedience. Thank you for all the time you’ve spent trying to get it right. *But now, I want all of it. Can you give me everything?* And his answer is, “No. I can’t.”

Which ought to make us pause and reflect that this whole “faith” thing is risky business! That we’re not here just because of what we need. That we’re here because we are needed—that everything we have is needed! God wants all of it.

Today is Confirmation Sunday. In a little while, we are going to invite our confirmands to come forward, and we are going to welcome them as members of the church. We’re going to affirm and celebrate them for the journey they’ve had thus far—and especially this year in their confirmation class—and we’re going to bless them for the journey ahead.

We often hear people say that our children are the future of the church—that our youth are the future of the church.

They're wrong. Our children are the church *today*. Our youth are the church *right now*.

You 8<sup>th</sup> graders who are being confirmed today, you are the Church—right now, today. And we need you. The rest of us in this room—we need you. We need you to keep asking questions, to keep growing, to keep challenging yourself, to keep challenging the church.

We need you to use your gifts and to think about what God is calling you to do—not just when you're older, but now. Because God wants you. Not just a part of you—not just your “church side” or your “religious side,” but all of you.