



## **“Wait, What is Going On Here!?”**

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### **Scripture (CEB):**

#### **Mark 10:17-27**

<sup>17</sup> 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?”

<sup>18</sup> Jesus replied, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except the one God. <sup>19</sup> 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.*”<sup>a1</sup>

<sup>20</sup> “Teacher,” he responded, “I’ve kept all of these things since I was a boy.”

<sup>21</sup> 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.” <sup>22</sup> But the man was disheartened at this statement and went away saddened, because he had many possessions.

<sup>23</sup> Looking around, Jesus said to his disciples, “It will be very hard for the wealthy to enter God’s kingdom!” <sup>24</sup> His words startled the disciples, so Jesus told them again, “Children, it’s difficult to enter God’s kingdom! <sup>25</sup> It’s easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God’s kingdom.”

<sup>26</sup> They were shocked even more and said to each other, “Then who can be saved?”

<sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them carefully and said, “It’s impossible with human beings, but not with God. All things are possible for God.”

## Sermon:

There is just no way this text is not gonna make you and me squirm.  
There is just no way it can't feel uncomfortable.

What is going on here?

What is Jesus saying?

Is there any way to make this pericope, this slice of the gospel of Mark, any less awkward for us, Americans who have so much?

Americans, who have more storage units than people?

Americans, who even when poor, have more than so many others throughout the world?

Americans, who are surrounded on all sides by a capitalist economy that urges them to buy, to want, to get more and more stuff all the time?

And there is Jesus, and his "give it to the poor and follow me".

As one honest commentator put it, "The first thing to say about this text, and hopefully not the last thing to say, is that there's pretty much nothing we can do but manage it."

And by managing, she meant using the time-honored strategies of telling ourselves:

1. Jesus was only talking to that one guy, not to me. Not my issue
2. I am not rich, so Jesus isn't talking to me. There is always somebody richer than me out there. Again, not my issue.
3. Nobody could keep the Law perfectly, including the rich young man, and no one could be expected to give up everything to follow Jesus either. Not my issue.
4. What we can't imagine doing, God will do in mercy for us. Whew!

I am sure there are more.

I am wondering where you think you belong among these strategies for managing a terrible Jesus story?

What if this is a terrible story about Jesus and a young man because Jesus saw, all around him, the crushing weight of poverty, and the narcissism of absurd wealth?

What if Jesus wanted to overthrow the thinking of the people, and the ancient world (and ours too)...and wanted wealth shared. Wanted an end to poverty, and an end to wealth. Wanted an end to all the clamoring and claiming "**my stuff**". Not our stuff. **My stuff.**

If the young man had left to follow Jesus, he would have been fed and sheltered and

clothed. The gospel is clear that the disciples “shared a common purse” for their needs. And received assistance from friends. Jesus didn’t go hungry, or walk naked through the cities and towns.

But he wouldn’t have had a lot of “his stuff”. He traveled light.

You don’t have to be super religious to know that there are many Christian models of “sharing a common purse” and “giving as any had need” and “living in community and breaking bread in gladness”. Franciscans are famous for it, and Benedictine monastics do it. Brethren, Amish, Mennonite. Hutterite. Poor Clare’s. Mother Teresa’s Sisters of Charity.

Living in simplicity, sharing all they have, making sure that all have what they need, but there is no excess for oneself. No hundreds of pairs of shoes, as one woman I deeply respect has admitted she has. No hundreds of thousands spent on everything and anything our society dangles in front of us.

Mother Elizabeth Seton said, “Live simply, that others may simply live.”

I don’t know if she, a widow with 5 children, could have walked off with Jesus. I do know she practiced that line that made her an American saint.

I’m not sure what Jesus is up to...

But I imagine that at the very least, ***he was trying to shock us*** into considering how deeply we are attached to “our stuff”.

- He wanted us to realize how little we give, because we are never sure when we will want more, or suddenly need more, or face a hunger for another thing! He understood greed, and anxiety, stinginess, fearfulness, entitlement.
- He wanted us to realize that there is no perfection in us; even when we think we are super, and doing super good stuff, “obeying the law since our youth” (as the gospel puts it)...we are still broken, still envious, still greedy, still clutching our stuff and not wanting to share.
- He is making us face the bitter truth that our love and our generosity tend to be small efforts, fearful, timid efforts.
- And finally, as the disciples stand there in total confusion about the impossibility of it all, Jesus reminds them, it’s not about you ...how generous, or how stingy, how rich or not yet rich enough...it’s about God, the creator of us all, the weaver of all our stuff, making it from star dust and atoms and divine Word. God, giving us everything!

And to respond to what God has done for us, Jesus says, “Act with large generosity, with large love...because that is what God has done”.

I hear Jesus challenging us all, “let your trust in God be large!”

Love more deeply, share less fearfully, practice giving it away and feeling free...

Jesus, the gospel of Mark says, “looked carefully at the young man and loved him”

Other than the love of God mentioned twice in the great commandment, this word, love, does not come up, again, in the gospel of Mark.

Jesus, in seeing with God’s own eyes, knows and loves that young man.

I believe that God’s love has the power to change us, perhaps slowly, but over time, we are changed by it.

It heals us in our broken places, strengthens us in our weakest places, changes us into a better version of ourselves...we grow (maybe in fits and starts) into braver, kinder, more generous and joyful, resiliently hopeful, people...looked at by God with such powerful love and care.

I do not believe that that loving look was wasted on the young man. I know, the text says he walked away, sad. But over time, he may well have been changed...

You and I may walk away from this challenging text and yet still be changed, as I said, changed over time, by the awareness of the loving generosity of God and the challenging stories of the gospel of Jesus. I say, don’t give up on that young man and his story. Don’t give up on yourself either.

I know this to be true...love changes us. I’m guessing God’s love could still work on the heart of that young man, even after he walked away.

Let us pray to be changed into more generous, hopeful, faith-filled people...so unafraid and unattached to stuff that we can love and be loved generously, share widely, let go, simplify so that others may live, rejoice in God’s surrounding love in everyone and everything.

Love large.

Trust large.

Share generously.

Make gratitude lists in your head and your heart.

Thank God often.

Alleluia, Amen.