

Pastor Jennifer Peters McCurry  
Emanuel's Lutheran Church, Bellevue, PA  
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Mark 10:17-31

If you could ask Jesus one question right now, what would you ask? Each of our answers are revealing about what is going on in our lives. About the worries and concerns that consume us.

The man in our gospel lesson is given exactly this chance. He asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (*Mk 10:17*) He's a Jewish man, for he knows the law. He has made efforts to live his life accordingly. As far as he can tell, he has been successful in his goal of living perfectly. Yet he comes to Jesus, seeking guidance with a guarantee.

It's too bad we don't know his tone. He may have been someone who asked earnestly. Perhaps he didn't think the way he lived could possibly be enough. Or he could have been a self-satisfied snot, who just wanted affirmation. We don't know what this man's agenda was.

Either way, we learn what he did not expect. Jesus' answered with the last thing he wanted to hear. “You lack one thing: go, sell what you own.” (*Mk 10:21*) The man “was shocked and went away grieving.” (*Mk 10:22*) Being good – or living a life according to the letter of the law – was not sufficient. He was asked to give up something important to him. He was to make a true sacrifice in the name of God.

Often when we think about giving to the church or to other charities, we don't think about sacrifice. We are responsible adults. We consider our choice after all our other expenses. We dream small, if at all, and end up giving pocket change. Our time and talents are most important, right?

Yet Jesus calls this man to more than a contribution of time and pocket change. He invites him to offer a true sacrifice. To loosen his hold on something that he holds dear – his possessions. The man's response of shock and grief speaks of this truth. Jesus has asked for a dramatic act. One that is both substantial and symbolic. The man is to offer things that he values deeply back to God. He is to give sacrificially. In his offering, he is to be part of God's good news for the poor, hungry, and oppressed. In a way that he had never imagined before. This is a way of viewing money that should challenge most of us. Forget lunch on-the-run or \$4 lattes. Our money can be put toward sharing God's love with the world. Helping to change people's lives for the better.

Jesus' critique of wealth is one that we all need to contemplate. Yet that is not the only target that Jesus focuses on in his disciples' lives. He calls followers to sacrifice whatever they hold most dear to follow him. We hear his list later in our gospel passage. He speaks of people who leave "house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good

news.” (*Mk 10:29*) On top of wealth, we add homes, family relationships, jobs that are our livelihood. He identifies many the ingredients of life that grant us a sense of place and stability. They provide what seems like an essential foundation for our lives. These valuable things in our lives are what we often choose to worship instead of God.

Today the Word teaches us that our actions and choices make a difference in our discipleship. It is necessary to sacrifice our old ways, if we worship God in the way of Jesus. We cannot follow this Christ without having our entire lives be consumed by the Spirit.

Our wealth, our material belongings, our toys, our homes. Our personalities, our egos. Our educations, our dreams, our fears. Our family relationships, our friendships, our relationships with acquaintances and strangers. Our recreation, our prayer lives. Our work, our sense of vocation, our down-time. All of it. God wants it all.

We each gladly let the Spirit into parts of our lives. But we all have something that we don't want God to get into. Perhaps it's how we spend our money. Or cherish our possessions, like our gospel gent. It may be our weaknesses of too much pride – or too little self-confidence. Our unwillingness to be straightforward – or our unwillingness to forgive.

Whatever part of our lives are hidden behind locked doors – in our hearts or on our calendars or in our homes. God wants at them. When we least expect it, the Spirit will sneak in. How we think about them will change. Our grip will loosen. Our hard lines will soften. They may be sacrifices that we would have grieved like the rich man – which living without would have seemed impossible. When Christ's Spirit has been working on us, these sacrifices will be easier than we expected. The impossible begins very possible – and even the way our lives should be. And our lives as disciples will become more complete.

Jesus promises great rewards for those who sacrifice in God's name, and for the sake of the gospel. We will “receive [all the things that we leave behind – house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields] a hundredfold now in this age... and in the age to come eternal life.” Our offerings in the name of Christ do not leave us impoverished, as it seems at first. We will receive many more blessings. The holes left after our sacrifices will be filled. Our needs will be met, and much, much, more.

With each step, we will grow to resemble the God whom we worship. With each offering, our lights will shine brighter in the world. With each sacrifice, our lives will become transformed.

If Jesus asked one thing of you right now, what would it be?