
Sermon – 21st Pentecost
Mark 10:23-31
October 21, 2018

“Put the Religion Over Here – In That Corner”

Solomon was King of Israel, the son of King David, and to put it mildly a man with an acquisitive streak. He built the Temple of Jerusalem, countless palaces, a great army, and filled his vaults with monetary tribute from foreign kings. Oh, and did I mention wives – 700 of them, many of foreign birth. Of one nuptial, II Chronicles 8:11 says “*Solomon brought Pharaoh’s daughter from the city of David to the house that he had built for her, for he said, ‘My wife shall not live in the house of King David of Israel, for the places to which the ark of the LORD has come are holy.’*” Well.

Pharaoh’s daughter was no pauper, but instead of allowing her to live in his palace, Solomon put her up in another one. Why? She was not a Jew, meaning she was a worshiper of a foreign god, and Solomon decided she shouldn’t live too near the temple in Jerusalem, where the Ark of the Covenant, which symbolized God’s very presence, was. **Solomon reasoned it was okay for him to be married to an idol-worshiper if he kept her out of his own religious life.** Time would prove that if he thought he could keep the one from touching the other he was wrong.

So when Jesus told a man of some means in our story last week to “*sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor*” – he may well have been thinking of Solomon – who really wanted to keep his faith intact but his possessions – excuse me but that is what his wives were – made that impossible. As you recall, at that suggestion the man went away “shocked” and “grieving,” because he was not prepared to part with them. Solomon had tried, in vain, to do something we moderns call “compartmentalizing” – keeping his faith and actions separate. Ditto the young man who sauntered up to Jesus.

It took only four piercing words from Jesus – “*one thing you lack*” to tell him being a Christ follower and putting off limits signs up wouldn’t do. Keeping things compartmentalized, religious observance in one room, enjoyment of possessions in another wouldn’t do. **Religious dedication dedicates everything. Taking things that are properly related and putting them in separate compartments in our minds so that they don’t have to rub up against each other and cause us any discomfort is natural, but in the end, sinful.** And the man in last week’s story exemplified that. He was religious but also happened to be rich and seemed to prefer the two did not touch - no friction between them.

The opposite of compartmentalization is “integration,” The word integration comes from the word “integer,” - a mathematical term for whole numbers. “Integrity” comes from the same word. They work well in describing Christian faith and life. But it’s not easy to “integrate” faith and life. Yet committing ourselves to Jesus means that we *don’t* divide ourselves into fractions called Christian and non-Christian. Still we ought not make of this young man exhibit A of how not to be integrate faith and life, because the disciples in our lesson today themselves protest the standard Jesus held this man up to.

“*We’ve left everything to follow you*” and to the extent Peter meant their homes, families and occupations he was right. But everything? Matthew tells us they hadn’t left behind their dislike of Romans and tried to stop Jesus from talking to a soldier by the road who wanted his servant healed. Mark tells us they tried to prevent children from receiving a blessing, hanging on to the idea prevalent in Jewish culture that since children didn’t contribute to the household they didn’t matter. Peter hung on to his resistance to the idea that Jesus should die for his sins, or that forgiveness should not be a number but a way of life.

James and John would show they’d hung onto their understanding of power, wanting Jesus to appoint them, in his kingdom “*at his right and his left*” – missing entirely the nature of Jesus’ kingdom in which he said; “*the last are first and the first are last.*” The disciple’s “astonishment” about the apparently impossible standard to which Jesus held a young man with possessions reveals at least two things - a generally accepted belief that wealth was a sign of God’s favor, and concern that if Jesus could ask this of him – what might he ask of them? It may have also contradicted their assertion they’d “*left everything*” or were prepared to “*give everything*” for the sake of the gospel.

More on that next week. But for our purposes today, we affirm a couple of important of things. One – the command to “*give all your possessions to the poor*” and follow Jesus is unique to this young man in Mark 10. Only in the story of the so called “widow’s mite” – where Jesus praises a woman who gave to the temple treasury “*two copper coins, all she had to live on*” is there another place we see total relinquishment of possessions discussed. Jesus teaches about wealth frequently, but usually only the kind of wisdom expressed in Ecclesiastes – that money is a hard master, demanding more than it gives in terms of time, attention and worry. Nowhere else does Jesus command poverty to anyone.

Jesus more frequently teaches that money and possessions themselves are servants of the kingdom. Jesus commended a Samaritan for generosity in caring for a man in need but did not say “*he gave up his entire estate for him*” – only what was needed. Jesus ministry was supported by women of means – Joanna and others, without which it would have been impossible to do what he did. Matthew says in his death, Jesus was given a dignified Jewish burial by a “*rich man from Arimathea*”, Joseph, who combined his wealth with a desire to use it for godly purposes and the courage to show that faith to the wider world – in his case Pilate.

These stories are about possessions, yes, but more than that they are about our understanding of what being a God-follower is. With Solomon and his wives, with a young man and his wealth, with the disciples and their attitudes about servanthood, the point is this – keeping things compartmentalized, devotion to Jesus in one room, enjoyment of anything else off limits to him in another won’t do. If Jesus is Lord, then he is Lord of all.

But remember, always remember – that’s its Jesus. AMEN