

March 8, 2015 - Third Sunday in Lent

Matthew 19: 16-22

We all have been raised with the expectation of the good life. Upward mobility and happiness were certainly linked by past generations. Now, I've noticed that the good life seems to change over time. One generation's idea of the good life, of what makes us happy doesn't live up to the next generation's idea about it. There was the good and happy life before the automobile and a different good and happy life after the automobile. There was the good life before computers and a different good life after computers. And even if we have our own version of the good life, we think there must be more. For some reason the good life fails to satisfy us completely, fails to fill us with happiness. Sadly the good life is really the life of appetite. And appetite while enticing knows no end. This is the case in our gospel lesson.

A rich young man comes to Jesus. He has everything by any stretch of the imagination, but wants even more. "What must I do to possess eternal life?" He asks Jesus. Notice he wants to possess even more than he already has. Jesus suggests some of the Ten Commandments and his own Love Commandment. The rich young man naively thinks he has already fulfilled these requirements and asks for more. Again notice the more. He has lived such a short and sheltered life that he hasn't even encountered these life challenges reflected in the don'ts, like murderous rage or the wandering eye of adultery. His wealth in the face of massive poverty hasn't even registered in his mind when it comes to "love your neighbor as yourself".

So, Jesus hits him between the eyes of his ignorant and self-absorbed attitude. "You want to know what's needed to possess real life, I'll tell you. 'Go sell everything you have and give the money to the poor and then come and follow me.'"

The rich young man is crushed. Jesus is telling him "let go of the good life you take for granted, if you want to find the real life that leads to the joy. Let go of what you think will make you happy and seek after true joy".

You see happiness and the good life are often confused with joy. We want joy in our lives and we think more of what we want will get us there, will make us happy. Or we think lots of what we lack will bring joy to us. Or we think just having the people around us who we agree with will be joyous. But even they get boring after a while. All of this is still the life of appetite speaking and it is never satisfied.

Joy is a totally different reality.

Joy participates in the Mystery in the midst of life.

Joy does not arise out of getting or choosing. Rather Joy arises out of giving and receiving. Giving and receiving are relational activities of the heart. We know the feeling when we are in sync with this mystery.

I experienced this joy on my birthday this week as friends created an outrageously funny surgery survival kit, for my upcoming hip operation, complete with a silver bell to ring for you-know-who to come running. I'll keep you posted on the bell thing.

Joy arises out of giving instead of getting, arises out of receiving instead of choosing. So let me tell you a story I adapted from the Internet this week that shows us the way toward joy.

A long time ago, two brothers shared a mill that ground the grain for their village. Each night they divide evenly their portion of the grain they had ground together during the day. Now it happened one of the brothers live alone, the other had a wife and a large family.

One day the single brother thought to himself; "It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly. I have only myself to care for, but my brother has children to feed."

So each night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary to see that he was never without.

But the married brother said to himself one day; "It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly, because I have children, I have children to provide for me in my old age, but my brother had no one. What will he do when he is old?"

So every night, he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary. As a result, both of them always found their supply of grain mysteriously replenished each morning.

Then one night the brothers met each other halfway between their two houses. Suddenly they realized what had been happening and embraced each other in Joy.

Application for Today

Letting go of the good life lead us into Joy, comfort and joy. Amen.