**Giving it up for Grace**

**Narrative Lectionary**

**August 26, 2018**

Mark 10:17-31 Russell Mitchell-Walker

This past week, I confirmed a diagnosis of moderate sleep apnea - I have 10-15 times in an hour when I stop breathing and I snore. So I need a CPAP machine to help me sleep with minimal breath stoppage and to stop my snoring. I got the machine on Wednesday and set it up that night. It is only a nasal mask that fits into my nose so is not too intrusive but will take some getting used to. I slept OK, still feeling tired in the morning but I didn’t snore so Brian had a really good sleep that night! It is a change to my comfort, my routine, and a challenge, but it is important for my health, (and Brian’s), and will be beneficial in the end. I need to trust that I will become comfortable with it and that it will help.

Trusting through change is very important as well as challenging. Not everyone can do it. Certainly the rich man in our gospel reading today was not able to trust that selling all he had and giving it to the poor would help him get eternal life. He had done all the right things, following the all the laws since his youth, which in itself, Jesus could have challenged but he chose not too. I suspect that he knew this was not the rich mans’ issue. It was the wealth that needed to be challenged. So, with love, Jesus tells him that there is one thing he lacks, he must sell all he owns and give the money to the poor, then he will have treasure in heaven. Jesus also invites the man to then follow him. The rich man goes away grieving and shocked because he had many possessions. What he needed most was to let go of his wealth, which kept him from trusting God fully.

The disciples were shocked too. It is a difficult and shocking message. Sometimes I hear that people want to hear a more nurturing, spiritual message and less social justice. The challenge can be the gospel and the Old Testament readings are not always very nurturing or comforting! This passage is a prime example, it is not very comforting to hear that Jesus wants us to sell everything that we have and give it to the poor. That is about social justice, a redistribution of wealth. However, while this is an important part of the message, it is not the whole message. We learn more when we look in context.

Just previous to this passage, Jesus brings the children to him and tells the community that unless you become like a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Children are trusting, are unencumbered by material things, and look to their parents for guidance and love. In the same way this is the kind of relationship Jesus is calling us to have with God. The rich man could not trust God because he loved his things, his wealth, too much. He may have lived a right and good life, but his relationship with God was hindered by his wealth. He thinks he can get to heaven by what he does and how he lives, he thinks he can inherit eternal life. However, it becomes clear from the story, especially in the conversation with the disciples that it is all about God’s grace. If it is hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom then how do any of us have a chance? Jesus tells them and us that with God nothing is impossible - it is God’s love and grace that makes it possible.

It is trust and faith that is important in our relationship with God. That we are open to God’s agency in our lives. We are not on our own and it is not all up to us. This is what was lacking in the rich mans’ life. The wealth and his unwillingness to give up his possessions was a barrier to trusting God. He could not trust that he would be OK without all he had, that God would be with him. How much do we find this in our lives? How often do we trust with God, that things will be OK? Or do we let our worry consume us? Our striving for success? What barriers are there in your life that hinder your relationship with God? That keep you from fully trusting God? This was the issue for the rich man.

It is interesting as well, to note that Jesus is asked this or a similar question about what must one do to have eternal life a number of times in the gospels. The answer is never the same. For this rich man it was to sell all his possessions. For Nicodemus, the Pharisee, he needed to be born again, or have a new way of understanding God and the Spirit. The story of the good Samaritan was the result of a lawyer asking the question, and when Jesus responded, “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself”, he asked who is my neighbour? We learn that the neighbour is a despised Samaritan who stopped to help the man who was beaten, robbed, and left on the road half dead. So Jesus’ expectation of what is needed for salvation or for eternal life, is different depending on the persons’ circumstances or context. However, you could say that they are all about trust, love, and grace.

While there is a clear challenge to wealth and material possessions (and we are all wealthy), in this passage, there is love and compassion from Jesus to the rich man. We may despise the extremely rich and the corporate wealth of capitalism and how it contributes to poverty in the world, but Jesus calls us to be loving and compassionate to all, including the rich. It is from this place of love and compassion that is the best place to challenge the dangers of wealth and materialism. It is important for us to remember as well, that on a global scale almost all of us are wealthy. So what are we going to do to address the challenge of this passage to give up our possessions? It is not easy or comforting. Jesus’ message is often challenging, but within that challenge, we will also always find love, compassion, grace and trust in God. The key message of this passage is that as hard as it can be to enter the Kingdom, with God nothing is impossible and it is about grace, grace and trust.

As I get used to the CPAP machine, I do trust that it will be easier and I will sleep better. I could have ignored the challenge, and for too long I did, and that has created challenges in my relationship with Brian. So by facing the challenge and with trust and faith, we will both sleep better and our relationship will be better as well. Just as our relationship with God improves when we face the challenges presented to us in life, or through scripture and trust that God is with us, we can make it through and it will be better. With God and God’s grace, nothing is impossible. Thanks be to God.