

Mark 10:17-31

The Rich Man

17 As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18 Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” 20 He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” 21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” 22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. 23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” 24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” 26 They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” 27 Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” 28 Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” 29 Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

So there is this famous romantic movie that was released 15 years ago: Notting Hill.
It's like a fairy tale, modern fairy tale, from a male point a view.
There is this guy in London, who isn't very much of anything -
he's shy, he's clumsy.
He owns a library, though a small library -
not many clients, not much money.

But one day there is this girl who enters his shop to buy a book.
And the girl turns out to be a Hollywood movie star.
Julia Roberts playing her own role – or close.
So of course, she is rich, she is famous and she is everything you can think of:
funny, witty, sexy
She's gorgeous.

And yet, as strange as it is, she's interested in the guy.
And they start dating.
And so you know: it's great.
I mean, it's absolutely unbelievable.

Yes, but the guy soon realizes that
dating a Hollywood star can make your life slightly complicated.
The press and the paparazzi, the ex boyfriends and the wannabes, the travels and long distance calls.
And also maybe,
he does not feel so worthy.

At some point, he can't deal with it anymore
And he breaks up.
The girl is there, in front of him
she says she wants him and the only thing
she asks of him is to love her back
and the guy says: no way
it's too much, so very complicated.

And you know, you're in your seat, you're watching the movie
and you want to say to the guy:
“Come on, it's Julia Roberts, you cannot let her down
Whose guy on earth has the chance to date that kind of girl?
Of course – it's going to be complicated
but isn't it worth your while?”

Well, I must say
as crazy as it is
the Gospel today makes me think of the movie.

There is this guy
He is nobody – oh he's nice and smart and kinda rich too
but you know, he's just a guy doing business as usual
in a small village in Palestine, 2000 years ago.
And suddenly he has in front of him
Like a wonderful, unbelievable apparition.
The very Son of God comes down from heaven to earth
and he visits him.
He stands in front of him
Jesus, the long waited long desired Messiah.

Jesus stands in front of the guy and the story says: He loves him.
And Jesus says he wants him
he wants the man to give his life for him.
And guess what happens then? Well, the guy turns him down.
The guy turns him down because, you know,
Having the Son of God in your life
It's going to be complicated.
There are so many other things that need to be taken care of.

And you know, you're holding the book, you're reading the story and you think:
“Come on, it's Jesus
Jesus is asking you to be his disciple
You can't have anything more important
You can't have anything better to do”

And yet.

Yet, as well as we know the story,

Aren't we all this young man,

turning down Jesus - again and again?

Although we are drawn to Jesus, we know that if we really get involved with him

he's probably going to make our life complicated

Because you know we all have better or even worst things to think of

and we all have more urgent things to do.

So yes indeed my friends, as the Gospel puts it:

How hard

How very hard

How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God.

How hard to accept the wonders

and the delights

of a pure great true love.

Choosing Jesus, the Son of God, the joy of the angels and archangels

or choosing to do our own thing?

It is like a camel trying to enter the eye of a needle

But also it's like: having an elephant in the room.

And we all ask: "Teacher, what should I do, what should I decide?"

But it's often only a way to step back.

Because if our church teaches us that Jesus is welcoming and good and today it looks like he is even quite easy going

Yet, deep down we know the truth in our hearts.

We know that having Jesus in our lives, it's going to be complicated.

It's going to be complicated,

First because we need to make time and to make room for him

But mostly

Because Jesus wants it all

The more you love Jesus, the more he asks of you.

You take one step ahead and you meet him and you think you're gonna talk to him and be fine with him and go on with your business as usual

And then – Jesus takes two other steps ahead

And you have to seek him again and again

Because he wants more of us than just this nice chitchat with him.

He wants us to follow him.

He wants us to do the things he does.

He wants us to love the way he loves.

Certainly it's not easy to be Christ's very own.

Yes, at times we're gonna feel discouraged, and lonely
and certainly we're gonna feel unworthy
and so it's easier to spend money, it's easier to watch TV, it's easier to have a little too much to drink
And the truth is that it's even easier to do a career, it's even easier to become rich and famous
than to have the Son of God being our true
and intimate friend.

And yet, when the Son of God shows up at our door
How can we shut him out
Because we need to run the shop?

I know many preachers will say:
You need to detach
You need to be willing to forget everything about
the cares and the pleasures of this world
to be able to receive Jesus.

Well, I don't think so.

I don't think this is where we should start.
I don't think the stuff we have, or don't have, is the problem.
And I do hope no one truly believes we will be able to choose Jesus
only when we are finally disgusted or disappointed by everything else.

I just think the problem is that
as the young man
we're not so in love with Jesus – that is all.

We're not so in love.

Have you noticed that Jesus quotes all the commandments
the man observes
except the two ones about love?
Jesus does not quote the commandments about love when he usually summarizes all the law with them.
As if he knew that the man was just happy with not doing anything wrong
- forgetting the most important.

Because the thing is that when you're truly in love
you don't even ask what to do with your time, or what to do with your money
or what to do with your life.
You know. You just know.

Well, to know what we need to do maybe we just need to fall in love with Jesus again and again
and so how very easy it will be to leave behind
- maybe not everything but -
what we need to leave behind
Because we'll find our purpose and our happiness in him only.

Yes we pray, we receive communion and we try to be good people
And like the young man, we respect the law.

But how long has it been since we haven't looked at the Son of God
amazed, thankful and full of joy?
How long has it been since we haven't spent one hour or even ten minutes
- even ten minutes – adoring him?

But Jesus looks at us and he loves us.
Jesus, the very Son of God
does not care that much for religious people who respect the commandments
Jesus is standing in front of us
And he is asking us to love him back.

You know, Peter may not have been the smartest guy on earth
And maybe not the most reliable
And maybe he wasn't much of anything
The Gospel tells us all the time he was confused and scared and maybe he was stupid
But he got it. He got it all.

In John's, at some point when people start to turn their back on him
Jesus asks the twelve:
“Do you also wish to go away?”
And Peter answers: “Lord, to whom can we go?
You have the words of eternal life”

Peter's heart was undivided – that's what happens when you love God with your whole heart
Peter just wanted to be with Jesus.
He knew
He just knew with his heart
he knew in his heart

That there is nothing else to be desired, there is nothing else be found besides Jesus. Amen.