



Roanoke, Virginia

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“Reimagined: Commitment”

Part VII of the Sermon Series, “Reimagined.”

Mark 10:17-31

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Last week we heard a beautiful sermon on the work before us to honor and lift up children as Jesus did, using the youngest and most vulnerable members of the community as exemplars of Kingdom inheritance. We are not jumping ahead in Mark’s gospel for today’s reading. We continue the story. Jesus blessed the children and now sets back out on his journey to Jerusalem. Listen for what happens next from Mark 10:17-31 and listen for God’s word to us today.

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.”

In preparation for the Youth Trunk or Treat tonight, I have been to several major retail stores lately. And I feel I am in a time flux because I see Halloween candy, sitting right next garland, which is hung beside Fall and pumpkin wreaths, right next to marked down wrapping paper. I mean, if you go to Hobby Lobby, Target, Walmart, or any major retail store, Christmas is upon us already... and Halloween is still a week away. The holidays have merged into one season...and that season is now! Black Friday sales seemed to have moved from the Friday after Thanksgiving to the first Monday of October... Fall decorations have been out since August and they seem to be stored away before Fall even begins... Halloween comes and goes... and Christmas preparations begin in July. I see scary clown costumes hanging right beside Santa suits.

There is a strangeness, and some confusion, that comes with jumping too quickly from one season to the next without any warning or rhythm. Part of the fun is in the transition from one season to the next. And I appreciate actual time spent in the transition ... taking deep breaths of the first chilly morning of September, wearing a coat to work, then shedding all my layers throughout the day and wearing a tank top home.

Valerie and I love to witness the leaves fall in the yard, the changing of the colors from bright green to warm yellows and reds. I do not want to jump too fast to snowy days and snowmen! Although I love the winter season, for me, lingering in each season, even lingering in the moments of the transition, allows me to prepare for the expectations that come with seasonal transitions.

Transitions happen not only in the seasons of nature, but in the seasons of life. Understanding what is next, preparing for what is next, and perhaps the eventual first steps are all hard. These moments of transition are moments moving into the future, a future that is unknown, a future that is maybe scary, a future that is almost always difficult: getting ready for the first day of school, going on a blind date, quitting a job to pursue another career, deciding to undergo experimental treatment for an illness that has become part of your identity, moving to a new city, discerning a call to ministry, discerning a call to serve the church as an elder, or the decision to join a church, or the moment you sell everything and give to the poor. This last one is what happened to the man in our passage.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, and a man—a young man as he is described in Matthew, a ruler as described in Luke—runs up to Jesus. The man kneels, taking a stance of reverence, and



addresses Jesus as “Good Teacher,” and says, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” And because this story is one of the most familiar stories in the Synoptic Gospels, we tend to run through it just as fast as the man ran up to Jesus. Jesus, in common Jesus fashion, dodges the man’s initial question and responds with his own, “Why do you call *me* good? No one is good but God alone.” (*my emphasis added*) Jesus then rattles off the commandments...well at least some of them. The commandments are split onto two tablets: one tablet contains the commandments regarding our relationship with God; the other tablet contains the commandments regarding our relationship with each other.

Which commandments did Jesus recite to our frantic friend? “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.” These are second-tablet commandments. I don’t hear any of the first-tablet commandments: You shall have no other God before; You shall not make for yourself an idol; You shall not take the Lord’s name is vain; Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Jesus insightfully recites only the ones regarding our relationship with each other.

The man responds, “I have kept all these since my youth” (well at least the ones Jesus mentioned). The man was probably like, “Oh good, Jesus skipped over the other ones... phew... those are tougher to keep.” Jesus then looks at him, loves him and says, “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.” The man was shocked. He turned from Jesus without saying another word, and left grieving for he had many possessions.

Each transition in life we are called into involves change, and with change comes loss, and with loss comes grief. We don’t know what happened when the man gets back to his home—Does he grieve because he knows he has to let go of everything? Or does he grieve knowing he cannot let go off everything? With change comes loss, and with loss comes grief.

Jesus then turns to the disciples who just witnessed this encounter and provides a quick, to-the-point explanation that riches will be the stumbling block for not only that man, but for many, who try to enter the Kingdom of God. It will be as difficult for the wealthy of this earthly kingdom to enter the heavenly kingdom as it is for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle.

Difficult or impossible?

The disciples turn to each other saying, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus responds to the disciples’ murmuring, “Yes, impossible for humans, but not for God. With God all things are possible.”

And then you got to love Peter! Peter always jumps in with his two cents, eager to prove he belongs and follows Jesus faithfully. He says, “Jesus, we have given it all up! We left our nets, our boats, our families, our friends, our lifestyles, and our wages. And we follow you!” “Peter you are



right,” Jesus says, “And what you left will return to you a hundredfold. Those who are first in this life, will be last in the life to come. But those who are last, will be first in the Kingdom of God.”

This familiar story is fast paced. It moves from scene to scene: the man was given a formula for eternal life. He grieves. Jesus teaches you can't enter the kingdom of heaven with riches, for humans it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. The disciples are perplexed. Peter speaks up. Jesus counters and teaches again: the last will be first, and the first will be last

And we are left confronted, uncomfortable, and even perplexed with this as those in the story were.

Let's try something.

Sit for a second with me... Breathe deeply and relax ... feel your body becoming quiet... Imagine that you are in one of your favorite places... How does that feel?... Now imagine that Jesus is sitting beside you... He is asking you to let go of something that can make it possible for further trust and faith... What might you be able to let go of so you can follow Jesus?... Will that be easy or hard?... Why?... What must you do to let go of that something... Breathing deeply and think about letting go and following the way of Jesus...

We can end here, reflect on what we need to let go of, the thing that stands in our way of fully trusting God, and decide to give what we can. Maybe you are like the rich man, and Jesus is asking you to sell and give money... Stewardship committee is nodding... Yes Ben. Stop there!

Jesus knew what stood in that man's way, so his call to sell and give was personal. So, for you it may not be money or wealth or possessions. Maybe something else is standing in your way. Maybe it is your anger that stands in the way of full trust. Maybe it is an addiction. Maybe it is the feeling that you are unworthy of love, so you keep at a distance. Maybe it is the idea that there is always something better just waiting for you, somewhere else or with someone else. Maybe it is your need for control or certainty. Maybe it is a relationship of resentment toward a family member or loved one, a relationship that seems can never be reconciled. Maybe that resentment is with your former self. Maybe it is a combination of these mentioned or none of these. What stands in your way?

Friends, as we are confronted with this question, I want to remind you: Jesus looks at you just as he looked at the man in the story. With deep compassion and deep love. No matter what stands in your way. Jesus loved that man. And Jesus loves you.

But if we linger a bit in this man's encounter with Jesus and his transition of trust, there is something more. Let's flip the script. If we slow down and reflect deeper, I believe we are also called to act like Jesus. There is a lesson Jesus teaches us: full trust, full investment not in material wealth but in the wealth of other's well-being, full investment of love, faith, and trust in God is the key to a now-and-not-yet kingdom inheritance.



But Jesus calls us to emulate his actions. What if we are equally called to respond to others the way Jesus responded to the man. Jesus knew what the man was going through, even though it seemed like he has followed the commandments his whole life. He was a devout religious man, yet there was something standing in his way. Jesus knew what it was. And Jesus looked at him and loved him. He loved that man and challenged him.

Sit with me again ... Breathe deeply and relax ... quiet your body one more time... Imagine you are back in your favorite place... Now imagine that a certain friend is sitting beside you... This friend is like the Rich Man, a friend struggling with trust, and you know what this friend is feeling... You love this person deeply... Who is sitting beside you?... You know what stands in their way, what is holding them back... What are you feeling?... Then you ask them to let go of something... How did that person react?... Spend a few more moments, breathing deeply and tell that person one more time that you love them...

Transitions are hard. Transitions involve change, and change involves loss, and loss involves grief. But the thread of God's love runs through it all.

Love is the basis of commitment. Love is the call. To love through change, to love through loss, and to love through grief. Love then carries us to commit again to depend on and trust in God.

I wonder who is showing you love, as you are called to let go of what stands in your way.

I wonder who you show love to, as you call them to let go of what stands in their way.

I wonder what love we can still share as each one of us is called to Go. Sell. Give. Come. Follow.

It will be hard, for humans it may seem impossible, but with God, all things are possible.

May it be so. Amen.

