

WELCOME 11 March 2018 4 Lent '18 B

Mark 10:17-34 & Isaiah 53:2-12

(Video – Finding Nemo “Mine”)

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here this morning. Please stay for morning tea after worship so we can get to know one another better...

“Mine.” One of the first words most of us learn to say...and one of the hardest to forget or at least use less. In our world where we prize self-sufficiency...“I did it myself – that is mine” are often the self-bestowed equivalent to a Nobel Prize.

But that sense of entitlement can break your heart. An attitude of entitlement hurts our relationship with God & others. Once you believe that all you have is a result of all you've done there's no room left in your heart for the Father who made you for himself...who created you to feel his delight & live from his pleasure at providing everything you need for life here & life with him forever.

Jesus once said, *“it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!”* It isn't hard to figure out why...CS Lewis nailed it “God gives where he finds empty hands. Someone whose hands are full cannot receive a gift.” How are your hands? Full of all that you alone can provide...and therefore empty on the day when it really matters? Or are your hands full to overflowing with what God has provided so you can share with others? Are your hands raised in thanksgiving to the God who made you to experience his love, his pleasure & his bounty forever? Or are your hands clenched desperately clinging to all that you say is yours because you've earned it...you're entitled to it?

Never forget the promise: ...*“Since God did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?” Rom 8:32* or this one *“And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.” Php 4:19* God does not deal with us as we are entitled, but by his grace. *We'll experience & explore that together today.*

LWKids is ON! Philippa & Hillary will lead our youngest disciples out to the verandah during the next song medley.

If you'd like to be part of that team leading our kids...see me today!

4 Lent '18 B – CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART: HEARTBROKEN BY ENTITLEMENT

- FAITH CHAT:** 1. In what parts of my life do I struggle with discontent?
2. In what ways do I compare my life to someone else?

Listening to the news this past week I heard the announcement of the treaty signed by Australia & East Timor...defining a genuine boundary/border ^{b/t} the 2 countries & ending years of squabbling over some offshore oil resources/revenue. It was interesting because at the same time there was lots of talk about the tariffs on steel & aluminum that US Pres Trump is enacting. Whether it's 2-year olds in the playroom haggling over toys or 2 countries debating the issue of the moment...those seagulls pretty well get the human condition. "Mine." We want what we think is ours or what we are convinced we deserve. Many of us in our working life move from "I'm happy to have a job" to "They're lucky to have me." It's the 1st rule of economics & maybe the 1st rule of human life: Our wants are unlimited, but our ability to satisfy those wants is limited. So we haggle & defend & insist & sometimes even negotiate so that we get & keep what we believe is "Mine." (earned & deserve – mine)

But that's not a new attitude. That's not unique to Western civilization or 21st century capitalism with its incredible affluence & insistence on rights...Jesus met it face-to-face on the road to Jerusalem...BIBLES...It's important to remember Mark recounts this critical moment in Jesus' ministry on the road to Jerusalem...As Mark retells the narrative of Jesus' life, beginning in Chaps 8 & 9 Jesus has been very open with his disciples about his mission as he moves closer to Jerusalem (rejection, betrayal, suffering, death/rez) but the disciples don't comprehend/seemingly don't want to understand what that means for him or for them. But whatever we might think it means, it is clear to Jesus this is his last journey of his earthly ministry.

As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, & asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus has barely begun when he is interrupted by this man falling at his feet. It's worth noting that. As Mark shares the good news, every time someone kneels ^{b/4} Jesus, it's because they require healing. Over the course of Mark's 16 chapters, every time someone is at Jesus' feet...they're sick/leprosy or they're demon possessed...they need to be healed & in Jesus they see he has the authority to do so. And nearly every time Jesus orders someone to go, like he does here, it's in relation to healing. So far that's all we know about this man. We know nothing more than he perceives an illness at some deep level that to him is obvious & besetting & he comes to Jesus to get it made right. Let's not be too quick to move on from there. I'm convinced he is deadly serious. This guy isn't just pious but sick, heart sick, & somewhere deep down he knows it & seeks out Jesus with his question about heavenly entrance exams because he knows that whatever his appearance on the outside, whatever his faithful/pious life, however blessed/together he may appear, he's still missing something, something important, something that matters, something that is an issue life & death.

But his question is odd...you "inherit" something because of who you are & who you are related to. In Jesus' day many thought they would inherit the Kingdom because they were related to Abraham. But he wants to "do" something to inherit/acquire whatever it is he perceives will fill the soul void – mend the breach in his heart. Here is a deeply religious person so well-attuned to his practices that he can sense there is more out there than what he has experienced so far. He asks Jesus about the "more," but his question focuses on what else needs to be added, accumulated & achieved. He seeks the next step, the next successful acquisition, the next box to tick. Eco 101...

So Jesus indulges a little back & forth about his "doings": The 2nd table of the commandments...the social responsibilities of life as one of God's people. *"Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young."* You see...we can make some assumptions about this man kneeling ^{b/4} Jesus. We can assume honesty, integrity & intelligence; he prospered in his business & he was wealthy. We can assume religious dedication because he knew/kept the commandments: **AND** for a 1st century Jew wealth/prosperity were sure signs of God's favour/blessing. This man is sincere. He is sincerely seeking, is apparently devout, & has lived his life carefully following the commandments. But given that...the void persists...the heartbreak is palpable...Jesus of course delivers the literal "money line": *Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," he told him. "Go & sell all your possessions & give the money to the poor, & you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

Can you feel the weight of that moment? Can you feel all creation hold its breath in anticipation of this guy's liberation & joy? Jesus really does love (agape unconditional love) him. Jesus sees that all this guy has – his knowledge of the law, his flawless piety, his abundant wealth – has distorted his sense of himself, & of God, & of his neighbour. His blessedness/prosperity/success has created a sense of entitlement & that has messed him up from the inside out. Once you believe that all you have is a result of all you've done there's no room left in your heart for the Father who made you for himself...who created you to feel his delight & live from his pleasure at providing everything you need for life here & life with him forever.

So Jesus calls for more than a change in the man's bottom line & more than a relinquishing of his acquisitions. He tells him to change his relationship to his possessions (to see them as an obstacle to the contentment he longs for) AND to use them as an opportunity to alter his relationship to the poor -- to help them, to identify with them, to become one of them, one with them...AND to divest so that he can really live by faith in God for the first time in his life, & thrown in for good measure be given treasure in heaven. Jesus' primary call is a call to a life of discipleship, not to a life of poverty. BUT...

Money, more than anything else we encounter in this world tests us with a simple question, "In what do you trust?" You see for this man his abundant financial resources were more than tools of power/influence/clout. His possessions were more than signs of his hard work, success, respectability. They were quite simply his security/personal bodyguard against all the vagaries/ravages of difficulty/hard times. His financial abundance/wealth was the castle wall/fortress behind which he could retreat in the face of any threat. In what do you trust?

So for Jesus to suggest that he give up his fortress, his financial security for the promise of an assurance far greater – a security far more lasting...was a huge step. But real security is found only in what you can never lose. Real security is found only in what can never be taken from you.

Surely this man was familiar with *Eccl 5:10ff - Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness! The more you have, the more people come to help you spend it. So what good is wealth—except perhaps to watch it slip through your fingers! People who work hard sleep well, whether they eat little or much. But the rich seldom get a good night's sleep. There is another serious problem I have seen under the sun. Hoarding riches harms the saver. Money is put into risky investments that turn sour, & everything is lost. In the end, there is nothing left to pass on to one's children. We all come to the end of our lives as naked & empty-handed as on the day we were born. We can't take our riches with us. This, too, is a very serious problem. People leave this world no better off than when they came. All their hard work is for nothing—like working for the wind. Throughout their lives, they live under a cloud—frustrated, discouraged, & angry.*

or *Prov 11:28 - Trust in your money & down you go! But the godly flourish like leaves in spring.*

or *Deut. 8...Moses points across to the Promised Land where God is going to plant his people...a land that flourishes & that God will give to them so they can flourish & he reminds them... "When you have eaten your fill, be sure to praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. "But that is the time to be careful! Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the Lord your God & disobey his commands, regulations, & decrees that I am giving you today. For when you have become full & prosperous & have built fine homes to live in, & when your flocks & herds have become very large & your silver & gold have multiplied along with everything else, be careful! Do not become proud at that time & forget the Lord your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt...He did all this so you would never say to yourself, 'I have achieved this wealth with my own strength & energy.' Remember the Lord your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful, in order to fulfill the covenant he confirmed to your ancestors with an oath.*

Let's leave this man for a moment & back up in Mark's gospel...Immediately before this encounter Jesus is mobbed by children. He gets surrounded it seems by a swarm of kids & the 12 start shooing them away & going off on the parents for not controlling their unruly little creatures. But Jesus is delighted & gives the disciples a swift kick in their backsides (rebukes them): *"Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." Then he took the children in his arms & placed his hands on their heads & blessed them.*

In what do you trust? Do you genuinely believe that the presence of Christ – that his blessing – his love – his arms around you & his hands upon you is enough? What more do you need? *At this the man's face fell, & he went away sad, for he had many possessions.* This is the ONLY occasion in the gospels when an invitation to follow Jesus is refused. The rich man misses out on eternal life not because he fails to carry out the commandments. The Law doesn't stand in his way. Instead he misses out by his refusal to relinquish his power/wealth/security into the call of Jesus. Abundant wealth was the barrier. Abundant possessions were the obstacle between the rich man & abundant life. He turned his back on Jesus & went sadly away.

What's on the GP today? "God gives where he finds empty hands. Someone whose hands are full of parcels cannot receive a gift." The world is all about getting, keeping, hoarding & protecting. Those blessed seagulls...they know us better than we do. Jesus instead invites us away from mindless "mine" to discipleship, devotion, servanthood & generosity for the sake of real love, real life & real wealth that never ends/fades. *"What do you profit if you gain the whole world but forfeit your soul?" – net loss.*

The point of this encounter is that salvation – eternal life – abundant life – "treasure in heaven" – is not for humans to grasp/win or conquer/obtain through our own efforts. That's why the disciples gasp, *"Who then can be saved?"* Well...it requires a miracle, but miracles are what God does. It requires death, but death is what Jesus does for us so we can die to ourselves & everything that would stand as an insurmountable obstacle between us & abundant life.

Just as large animals simply do not fit through tiny openings, so the wealthy do not fit in the kingdom of God. No human can liberate another person from the enslaving power of wealth...attitude of entitlement. The rich man went away sorrowful because the bondage to things cannot be broken human will or effort. *"Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God."* Who then can be saved? If being saved depends us...No one. If God can save & raise the dead...Anyone - Everyone.

There is incredible eternal comfort there...That in fact is the good news that you & I find ourselves embraced in the mysterious saving grace of God. It is there where we find the promise that Jesus will work that transforming miracle in each of us – calling you & me away from our old securities that are no security at all. Jesus calls us farther & farther deeper & deeper into trusting him - away from all we previously held dear & into the confidence/assurance of a relationship with Him. He assures Peter & the others who "have left everything" that he himself makes up for every loss. In what do you trust? Do you genuinely believe that the presence of Christ – that his blessing – his love – his arms around you & his hands upon you is enough?

Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah. The first...first born...If anyone has reason to boast in his firstness to lay an entitled claim to the benefits of being first; it's Jesus. But he comes to be last. To be last all the way to the cross & grave so that sinners can be first. He comes to be last to make sinners first to enter the joy of the kingdom which comes to the undeserving the unworthy the unentitled. That is the abundance of grace that Jesus offers...Chris Parker - The Frog & The Fish - A life without grace isn't really life. At best it's swimming in a shallow sea of anxious striving & self-serving; through working hard, being 'sexy', owning stuff, relying on feelings, & focusing on happiness. These never bring the depth of joy they promise. At best, life without grace is just killing time

Let's pray for abundant life lived fully now in the arms of Christ who blesses beyond our wildest dreams...Heavenly Father, you do not treat us as we deserve but according to your grace & mercy. Forgive us for indulging a spirit of entitlement, presumption & ingratitude. In their place plant in our hearts thankfulness, generosity & joy. Cause your love to flourish among us so the world will be drawn to love you. In Jesus' Name...Amen.