

Mark 10:17-31/Oct. 10, 2021

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, what is your philosophy on re-gifting?

If someone has given you a gift for which you have no need, is it ok to give it to someone else?

It seems that that quandary comes up quite often with wedding gifts. How many toasters does one couple need?

Now, some people would say – If someone gave you a toaster and you already have one, put the new one in the closet and hold onto it until your old one breaks down, and then take out the one that is in storage and use it. The gift was given to you after all. It's yours and the person who gave it to you wants you to have it.

Ok. I guess that makes sense.

But, what if your neighbor comes by and says – “My toaster just broke and I have company over for breakfast and I need a toaster.” What would you do?

Say – “Sorry – I’m using my toaster, go use your oven,” and close the door in their face? Have them bring the bread over and you’ll toast it for them? Give them your old toaster and break out the one in the box that’s been in the basement for 10 years? Or, give them the toaster in the box and tell them – “bon appetit!”

What would you do?

In today’s Gospel reading we have a very wealthy man. In Mark here it doesn’t say how old he is. In other texts it is a rich young man, but Mark doesn’t tell us that.

One of the pictures for us to use on our bulletins for today, which I didn't use, was an old man kneeling at Jesus' feet, which also brings up an interesting question of whether or not age matters in this story. Something for you to discuss over breakfast, with your toast.

But, let's get back to the fact that in the Gospel reading we have for today, we have a wealthy man that has everything, and we have all the poor people who have nothing.

Now, Jesus loves this rich man and Jesus invites him to come follow him and give his stuff to the poor, but instead the man goes away grieving. He goes away grieving.

Has he chosen his stuff over eternal life? Is that why he is grieving? Or is he grieving his stuff, because he is going to go sell it?

We don't know what happens after he leaves, but the fact that he is grieving as he leaves is interesting.

So, my question is - Is grief the proper attitude toward stuff?

When I think of grief, I think of a relationship lost – someone died or something has happened that destroyed the relationship.

So, is he grieving his stuff or is he grieving his lost relationship with God, and thereby with others?

Because eternal life is all about our eternal connectedness to God, and the Kingdom of God is all about our relationship with others. So, just as God, the Trinity, is relationship, so our relationship with God automatically includes our relationships with others.

And you'll notice that the man asks – “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Inherit – that also has a connotation of relationship and someone dying.

Now. What we know, that this rich man did not know, is that in Jesus' death and resurrection, we do inherit eternal life.

For us mortals, we cannot earn eternal life, but we do inherit it.

So, the issue here is not eternal life, but living in the Kingdom of God here and now.

The man is invited to use his belongings for the well-being of others – that's the Kingdom of God.

Jesus doesn't tell him he can't have eternal life. Jesus instead invites him into the Kingdom – to use what he has for the good of others. To take that toaster out of the closet and give it to someone who could use it right here and now, because that not only helps the neighbor, but it also builds relationships.

Jesus already loves this rich man. That's not the question. God loves everyone.

But the rich man loves his stuff more than he loves other people, especially the poor who can do nothing to build up his status in the world.

Perhaps Jesus sees this rich man and realizes that he has no healthy relationships, not even with his stuff, so he invites him to come with him and be relational instead of materialistic.

In the book of Mark, any time someone kneels before Jesus it is because they need healing.

This man needs healing, and Jesus wants to exorcise him of his stuff. His stuff has a hold of him.

What the rich man cannot see is that he has been set as a steward of what he has. God has gifted him with his stuff, so that he can use his gifts for others.

Jesus is inviting this man into God's kingdom, but instead he goes away grieving. This should have been a moment of joy, but for him it is a time of great sadness.

He could have been part of a community, but instead he leaves all by himself, alone.

And so we have the comparison of Peter and this un-named rich man. Peter has left what he has and he is part of a community, which has brought him joy.

It's not that God loves Peter more than this rich man. It's that this rich man is missing out on loving God in return.

You'll notice that Jesus only asks this man about the commandments of the second tablet as they are called – those that pertain to our neighbors. Jesus does not ask him about the commandments of the first tablet – those commandments that deal with our love of God.

Yes – he has taken care to follow the second tablet, but when Jesus asks him to live the first tablet, he walks away.

How do we love God? By loving our neighbor.

As Luther points out in the Small Catechism, the 10 Commandments are not just about not hurting our neighbors – that's second tablet stuff – but it's also about helping them – that's really first tablet stuff.

How do we love God? By loving our neighbor, which is more than just not hurting them, right? It's about making sure that they have life, just as we are given life. It's the building up of relationships.

This rich man hasn't killed anyone, but he hasn't done anything to make sure they stay alive either.

This rich man hasn't slept with another woman, but he hasn't done anything to prevent poor women from going into prostitution.

This rich man has not stolen from anyone, but he has no interest in helping the poor to simply live so they don't have to steal.

He hasn't lied about anyone, but he condemns the poor as not being worthy of being taken care of.

He has honored his own parents, but he has not taken care of the widow who lives on the street, who is also his elder.

The man has lived the law, but he refuses to live the gospel. He refuses to take the next step that Jesus invites him into.

And, we all fall into the trap of thinking that all we have and all we are is our own. But, all that we have and all that we own is actually God's. We are simply stewards of all that God has placed in our care, and with it we can do good or we can do ill.

Everyday Jesus invites us to use our gifts for the good of others.

Everyday Jesus invites us into the Kingdom of God.

Jesus will never cease inviting us to live as his hands, feet, and voice in the world. Just as he will never remove eternal life from us. That's the Holy Spirit. That's the promise of baptism.

We are eternally connected to God and the good news is that we get to live that out in the world here and now by caring for the poor.

Love God. Love neighbor. Love God by loving the neighbor.

We are stewards, not possessors. We grieve people, not stuff.

Thanks be to God. Amen.