

## **One more Thing**

Pentecost 21B

St. Andrew's Kelowna

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**In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Yesterday about 20 people gathered for the interment of Frank Pearson's ashes out at Lakeview Cemetery. Some of us remember Frank and Elsie, the square dancing they held in their basement and the pair of them dancing when he was so very tall and she so very short. After the service, one of the family friends began to tell me about Frank's life and his remembrances of Frank's faithfulness and kindness turned into musings about faith in our city of Kelowna and how it seems that in a valley full of so much natural abundance and so much wealth people are so reluctant to ask about God or pay God more than lip service.

This morning we are given a moving encounter between Jesus and a man who is wealthy. It was common for people in Jesus' day to ask teachers what was required of them to inherit the Age to Come. The Age to Come was not heaven; the Jewish worldview was such that there was the present age now and then, when God came to make world to how it should be, there would be the Age to Come. Different teachers and groups gave different answers and some required the following of stringent purity laws to make ones' self ready. So Jesus' answer is actually rather plain. He sites 5 of the commandants adding one about not defrauding anyone. Scholars say the rest of the 10 commandments are inherent in the conversation: calling no one good but God alone and not putting anything else before God particularly money covers the rest of them. But there's more going on here than just the 10 commandments.

The man who is wealthy asks Jesus what he can do to inherit the Age to Come and tells Jesus that he has kept the commandments since childhood. The man's question betrays his assumption that all that is necessary is for him to do more things. Wealth has a way of seducing us into this mentality of self-sufficiency unlike anything else. We've earned it, we have it, and we can do anything with it. We live in the myth of the self-made person, which in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, extends beyond just our jobs to say that self-actualization – becoming who we are called to be- is entirely within our own doing particularly when we can afford the right diet and exercise regime. It's all about us, what we can do and what we can choose. So much entitlement winds its way through the way of being that wealth produces.

And so Jesus gives the wealthy man a long, hard look. And, says the text, he loves him. What an extraordinary detail to keep through the centuries; what a marvelous moment! In the midst of this man's utter self-sufficiency, in the midst of his assumption that he's the one who can get himself into the Age to Come if he just has

the instruction, Jesus loves him and (depending on the translation) says to him: 'One more thing...'

This one more thing is the very thing that will enable the wealthy man to realize that all depends on God and not on him. 'Sell your possessions, give the money to the poor and then come and follow me'. In other words, the only other thing you can do is learn that everything depends on God and then and only then will anything be possible for God.

And so it makes sense that Jesus says it will be extremely hard for a wealthy person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, for that Kingdom is where God reigns, where God's desires are lived out, where all depends on God and there is absolutely no space for our entitlement. The disciples are shocked! There were some religious groups in Jesus' time, as there are many in our time, which saw wealth as a sign of God's favour. But here we learn it's not a sign, it's an impediment.

And so for us, where even the poorest of Canadian poor are drastically more wealthy than most of the world, what do we do?

This Gospel reading invites us to take a good, hard look at our lives and ask how much we really depend on God. Those of us who have had health issues in these recent weeks know with clarity that all of sudden very little depends on us at all. And curiously, that is often what it takes: a health issue or the funeral of the friend to trigger this realization. The key to discipleship is practicing this utter dependence on Jesus even in the very best of times and especially in the midst of wealth and abundance.

Our reading from Hebrews this morning opens up for us the moment in the Gospel when Jesus looks at the wealthy man and loves him: "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Jesus knows all ways our self-sufficiency crowds God out and blinds us to the Coming Kingdom. So all we need to do is ask. To kneel like that wealthy man did and let Christ look on us with his immense love. Letting God behold us in love is one of the most difficult practices in our prayer lives. But we need to do it, to just sit in God's love for us, and in that love ask Christ how to depend on him totally. For Christ knows all the many things we have done to try to love our neighbors and he will see us and love us deeply and then say to us: One more thing...

Amen.