

Mark 10:17-31

Today we have a very poignant story of a young man who wanted to experience the eternal life that Jesus spoke about. Surely what all of us here today want.

This man is a good man, who kept the commandments, and who recognised in Jesus someone who spoke God's truth, offering something that he hadn't experienced by keeping the law, ie *doing good works*.

As Jesus walked along, the man ran up and knelt on the ground before him. '*Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*' He seems keen and humble. Jesus gives a rabbi's standard answer, '*keep the commandments*', which give us a framework for living in God's way. '*Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth*'. The man was comfortable with rules and laws, outwardly he was a model of good religious behaviour, but Jesus looks into his heart. (cf Hebrews 4 '*the word of God is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart*').)

'*Jesus, looking at him, loved him*'... What was Jesus looking for? Maybe he saw the man's rich clothes, possibly the man's confidence in his bearing, but Jesus looked into the man's eyes, into his heart, and saw what this man truly was, and Jesus then spoke out of love. '*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*'. Jesus saw that this man was trusting in his wealth and not God. Wealth can give a sense of confidence and entitlement, which is misplaced. The man thought his good behaviour, his standing in the community, his wealth, all meant that Jesus would welcome him with open arms, as a model of goodness, but he received a shock, here was something that money could not buy. Now he had a choice. For this man it seems money had become an idol, it probably shaped his life, occupied his time, energy and thoughts, but it left an emptiness within him.

We might ask ourselves, what shapes our lives? What occupies our time, energy, thoughts?... It may be God and doing his will, but God is easily displaced, often subtly. Jesus tests this man where it really counts, did he really want to be a disciple of Jesus? Where was his heart? Where was his trust? Jesus says to this man, '*come, follow me*'. What a wonderful invitation, to go with Jesus and to seek to live as Jesus lived.

This is **our** calling, for all of us, as Christians. To model our lives on Jesus.

For this man to follow Jesus would mean a big change. For all of us it means change and self-examination, lest something else takes God's place in our lives.

Maybe there are things that we hang onto that hold us back from following Jesus?

'*When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.*' For this young man, something else was more important than God.

Eternal life is the life we experience when Jesus is given priority in our lives, which will present a different challenge for each of us. This is why our experience of eternal life is partial in this world, as we are imperfect and sinful human beings.

Jesus then uses this incident to teach his disciples about wealth.

'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!' (v23) Having wealth can obscure the fact that we are dependent on God. Wealth can make us arrogant, and think we are self-sufficient. *'the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, 'Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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.'* (v24-25)

Jesus breaks the tension by making them smile, with this silly picture. Exaggeration to make a point. Being rich poses serious challenges when we seek to follow Jesus.

This has been the experience of saints through the ages, who have lived lives of sacrificial generosity: St Francis, John Wesley, Mother Teresa, ..

'They were greatly astounded and said to one another, 'Then who can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, *'For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.'* (v26-27) We cannot earn our salvation, however rich we are, we can only trust in God, and accept the free gift of Jesus. God's goodness makes up for what we lack in trust, when our hearts desire is to do his will.

'Peter began to say to him, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you.' 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, 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.* (v28-30)

God is no-one's debtor. We receive far more from God than we could ever give up for him. We share new relationships within the church, and this presents a challenge to us all to live generously with each other.

Finally, Jesus says, *'But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.'* (v31)

Jesus came to turn the world upside down. Many came to Jesus with nothing and went away rejoicing; this man came with everything and went away sad. It is those who are willing to honestly examine their own hearts and choose Jesus over all else, who grow rich in faith and love, who fully experience the life that is eternal. May we be among them.