



Sermon for the 20th Sunday after Pentecost, Oct. 10, 2021

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Glenda Empsall, Deacon

[Job 23:1-9, 16-17, Psalm 22:1-15, Hebrews 4:12-16, Mark 10:17-31](#)

O Lord, our times are in your hands. In you alone is our salvation. Amen.

If it has been a while since you cozied up with the book of Job, you might want to revisit it and get to feeling better about your situation. Bad things happen to good people all the time, and Job's story has a happy ending.

Job did not know why he was being persecuted. Only the reader has the "inside story." Without evidence, Job's friends assumed Job was guilty of some impropriety. Job proclaimed his innocence, but acknowledged that no mortal could prevail over the all-powerful Creator. Job only wanted an opportunity to plead his case before God, but in today's reading, Job laments that he cannot find God.

We wait until chapter 42 for the happy ending. "The Lord restored the fortunes of Job and gave Job twice as much as he had before." Job's health, wealth, family and friends [even the fair-weather ones] were restored, and Job learned many lessons.

- Suffering is inevitable and unavoidable no matter how 'good' you are.
- Friends do not always know what is best for you.
- God will not be defined according to human standards.
- God is sometimes silent but is always present.
- God loves you and everyone else, too.

Job was a righteous, well-respected, wealthy man who loved God. The Gospel reading features a rich young man who thought eternal life was something that could be inherited, and who could not accept the true cost of discipleship. [What perfect readings for us to begin thinking about Stewardship!]

The rich young man knelt respectfully at Jesus' feet and asked, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" As he often did with the Pharisees, Jesus began his answer with a question, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God." Jesus then listed some of the Ten Commandments. The rich young man said he had kept all of the commandments. In that culture, wealth was perceived as a reward for keeping the Law, and perhaps eternal life would be his reward for good performance.

Jesus knew about "works righteousness," what we might call the "prosperity gospel." "Good" people get blessings and wealth, and those 'other' people are punished with disease and poverty. The rich young man's question was sincere. Jesus looked at him, loved him and answered, "... sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, "he went away grieving, for he had many possessions."

The rich young man came to Jesus earnestly wanting a formula for salvation, but he was loath to make such a drastic change in his lifestyle. The emotional attachment to his possessions made him unwilling to commit everything he had to follow Jesus. His response revealed that he had not kept all of the commandments. The rich young man had made wealth and possessions his god. Jesus did not unlove him. I think Jesus was sad that the rich young man walked away, but I don't think Jesus was surprised.

Peter Block writes in his book *Community, the Structure of Belonging*, that "Commitment is a promise made with no expectation of return... independent of ... approval or reciprocity from other people." Block claims that "no" is the beginning of commitment. "No" may mean you are reviewing the situation, thinking about the offer and exploring options. Jesus promised the rich young man "treasure in heaven" and the rich young man said no.

What is your "no" to Jesus? To what would you say "yes?"

I'm always curious about what happens to people after their encounter with Jesus. The rich young man went away grieving because he had many possessions. We don't know if he ever reconsidered and changed his mind. I'd like to believe that he reevaluated his relationship with his wealth and maybe sold some of his possessions and distributed some of his money. Or perhaps the rich young man did as Francis of Assisi did ~1200 years later, and renounced all of his wealth and privilege. We'll never know for certain, but people can and do change.

Jesus' disciples were confused by the idea that it would be hard for the rich to enter heaven. Rich, influential people had it all. They controlled everything. If it was impossible for the wealthy to gain eternal life, how could ordinary people? Jesus reminded them that salvation is God's job, and nothing is impossible for God.

Dear Peter was quick to remind Jesus, "... we have left everything and followed you." Then Jesus promised everyone "... 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, will receive a hundredfold in this age ... and in the age to come eternal life."

Jesus also said, "... many who are first will be last, and the last will be first." Many people who have everything now will go to the back of the line and those who live on the margins will get a place in the front of the line. Jesus' grace and love, his ministry and mission with marginalized people, confronted the system of power and domination; of might makes right; of indifference and neglect.

We are born with nothing. We take nothing with us when we die. We leave only our legacy behind. Let our legacy be that we followed the way of Jesus, not only with our lips, but in our lives. Amen.