

Sermon on Mark 10. 17-31
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Jesus is on the road again and just as the disciples think they may be getting a grasp of what is really going on, they hit yet another brick wall.

Even someone who has kept the commandments all his life?

The one who is wealthy? Then who can be saved? They ask.

Another unsettling episode, a dramatic turning point. Their ideas have been turned not only upside down but inside out. A wealthy person who kept the commandments, the envy of his community and regarded as one who enjoyed God's favour comes to Jesus and this is the reply?

The shock of the disciples makes sense because in Judaism, wealth was often seen as a sign of God's pleasure. A way of measuring the kingdom of God by the world's standards. This is just one of many stories of Jesus's attentiveness. Jesus noticing. Jesus seeing. And it presents us with a significant question that we too could ask?

"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus replies to the man in front of him in a personal way.

But in verse 21 it says; *"Jesus looked at him and loved him"*

In some translations this is written as *"Jesus looked at him and embraced him"*.

Jesus sees the person in front of him as he truly is. He sees exactly what is holding him back. Jesus knows what it is that the man needs to hear.

Jesus in his ministry would often notice the marginalised, the people we overlook. He noticed the child, the leper, the woman, the outsider. The one whom everyone's gaze passes over because they don't matter and

he truly sees the heart of the one whom the world judges by the way they dress, speak or behave.

In an interview, Desmond Tutu spoke movingly about the day he and his mother were walking down the street. Desmond was 9 years old.

A tall white man dressed in a black suit came towards them.

In the days of apartheid, when a black person and a white person met while walking on a footpath, the black person was expected to step into the gutter to allow the white person to pass and nod their head as a gesture of respect.

But this day, before a young Tutu and his mother could step off the pavement, the white man stepped off into the road and, as they walked past, he tipped his hat in a gesture of respect to her!

The white man was Trevor Huddleston who was an Anglican priest and later became a mentor to Desmond Tutu.

Having been taught that white people don't do that to black people Desmond questioned why such a thing could happen.

There is something liberating about seeing people truthfully, seeing differently.

It changes people's lives. It changed Desmond Tutu's life, he said;
'When she told me that he was an Anglican priest I decided there and then that I wanted to be an Anglican priest too'

When Jesus looks at people, he does not see as we see. He looks beyond the exterior to what lies beneath the surface. He sees the heart of the person.

Like the situation when Jesus met the woman at the well, Jesus sees things as they truly are, which is often beyond the images we project, the mask we wear or the Sunday best we clothe ourselves in. It is true

that no one's heart is completely pure. In every human heart there is a mixture of good and the not so good.

It might be that the person sitting next to us in church is going through a difficult time or for them life is great at the moment. Whichever it is, we all come with the faces we wish others to see. We guard ourselves by being careful what we reveal to the world, but God sees through that façade into the heart.

I wonder, do you think of yourself as a creative person? Do you create things with your hands? Or in your mind?

At the heart of every creative person is the beauty of seeing what is not there, the possibilities and the vision of what can be made from the raw materials they have. Having a vision is their gift.

In the wonderful words of Michelangelo he said he *"could see the figure in the stone, he didn't actually make the statue but rather he released it from the block of stone because he saw what was there"*.

I am no Michelangelo, but I can see that there is something we can all think about here.

Maybe we are all blocks of plain, natural stone before God and God sees within that plain exterior a new and wonderful work of creation, his work of creation and it is God's plan to reveal the beauty of every human being by unveiling that beautiful image inside each one of us. Chipping away at the stuff that holds us back. The stuff in our lives that keeps us from being the people we are created to be.

So, what is it in our lives that, like the rich young man, gets in the way of us finding eternal life?

What are we attached to? What are we paying too much attention to? What is it that clouds our vision of God?

It may not be our love of wealth. For some of us but could it be the need for reputation, for status, chasing more and more qualifications or something else.

These aspirations and goals can easily get in the way and take the place of God in our lives.

God is God but we are imperfect human beings. We can easily convince ourselves that we are living the right way and others are not. But this passage challenges us to look at ourselves, not judge others.

I wonder what it is that enables us to look from a more Godly and helpful perspective? Perhaps it is partly learning to accept ourselves as we really are.

When we are truly honest about who we are, then we can look at the way we live in a truly honest way and be aware that we need to make changes. That can be quite frightening because we need to be open to change and we need to make ourselves vulnerable. That is a scary thing to do.

Most people find it difficult to look at themselves with love; it is human to struggle with that. We judge our own actions, and we wonder to ourselves 'why did I do this?' 'What possessed me to say that?' Or 'I could have done that better.' Sadly we often try to duck out of God's gaze because we are scared of what he will see and we are scared of what that will reveal to us. But, to see ourselves as God sees us is a profoundly liberating thing.

Our New Testament reading is helpful and can be quite reassuring: -
Heb. 4. 12 - end

15 For 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. 16 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.

When I accept that God looks on me with love, then I am free to become the person he created me to be and that's how God looks at each one of us because we are his beloved children.

If we are to become better disciples, then we must be honest about ourselves and be willing to let God show us the things we can change and then be ready make those changes. Amen