

“Show Me The Money!” GPPC 10-14-18
Hebrews 4:12-16, Mark 10:17-31

In the 1996 movie “Jerry Maguire,” Tom Cruise plays a successful and slightly sleazy professional sports agent who has an epiphany, a sudden attack of conscience. And one night in a fever of inspiration he writes a mission statement for his life and work. He sends it to the entire company. And promptly gets sent packing. Cruise only manages to hold onto one client, a talented, complainer, slacker who never quite reached stardom, NFL receiver played by Cuba Gooding, Jr. If you’ve seen the movie, you know it ends well, and it’s really about personal growth. But Cruise spends much of the movie not only trying to negotiate a better contract for Gooding, but also quite a bit of time and energy trying to get Gooding to give his all as a player. Gooding spends a good bit of the film playing lackluster football and griping to Cruise that he’s not earning an appropriate superstar salary. Over and over, sometimes with dance moves, sometimes with assistance from others he yells at Cruise, “Show me the money!” “Show me the money!”

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Well, the Bible passage today also says, “Show me the money!” And like last Sunday’s reading from Mark, this passage is puzzling in some ways. Yet like “Jerry Maguire,” this is a good news story about the potential for personal growth and for a remarkable ending.

Mark begins by saying Jesus was setting out on a journey, a good reminder that for Christians following Jesus is always a journey, never something fixed, always a voyage of new understandings and adventures.

Jesus was setting out on a journey and a man ran up, and knelt before him. What a strange thing to do. Why was he running? The text doesn’t say. But if you go to the movies, notice how often, especially in action films, we have characters running. How does this make us feel? It makes us feel a sense of urgency, doesn’t it? Something important is going on, something that cannot or should not be delayed. The man came running up and knelt before Jesus. We see urgency and respect.

And then the man asked a question, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Two quick observations here. First, it was unusual for a rabbi of the time to be called “good.” It happened, but it

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was unusual. Second, doesn't it seem odd that the man was asking what he needed to *do* to inherit eternal life? Doesn't an inheritance, by its very nature, mean something that is given not earned? And what does he mean by eternal life, anyway?

We tend to think of eternal life as going to heaven when we die—life that never ends. And maybe there is some of that here. But as one professor puts says eternal life, "...signals a way of being in community in this world, more than a place in the hereafter." (Shelly Matthews in *Feasting on the Gospels: Mark*, 315.) So the man may have been asking not merely how to get into heaven when he died but how to live the most faithful life right then.

Jesus heard the man's request, but he rejected the man's compliment and asked, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone."

Now if you read the gospels, you see Jesus not only giving friendship and love but also accepting it from his disciples. But Jesus never accepted flattery.

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Beware any leader who needs flattery, much less insists upon it. Those who need to be flattered are easily duped and manipulated and they will lead out of self-interest rather than what is best for others. When true leadership requires courage, (as it often does), folks who rely on flattery will crumble into the powder of cowardice. But people who need no flattery are leaders who can stand alone, if need be, and do the right thing whether it is popular or not. Beware of leaders who need and insist on flattery.

Jesus, leader of leaders, refused the flattery, and gradually began moving toward a healing truth. He said to the man who wanted to inherit eternal life, “You know the commandments.” Jesus then listed five of the Ten Commandments having to do with human relationships. And he threw in a sixth commandment not found in the Ten Commandments, “You shall not defraud.” An odd thing to add. And scholars think he added it, because it points toward the deeper issue the man was facing, the deeper issue Jesus would soon reveal.

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So the man continued the conversation, dropping the flattering adjective for Jesus, and saying simply, “Teacher, I’ve kept all these commandments since youth.”

And at this point, you and I might expect Jesus to answer, “Wait a minute. Everybody makes mistakes. I know you have broken some commandments.” But Jesus did not go down that path.

Instead, Mark says, Jesus *looked* at the man and *loved* him. Jesus did not scowl and yell at him. Jesus simply looked at the man and loved him. And then he told him the truth. “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you’ll have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

Jesus looked at the man and loved him. And because he loved him Jesus told him the truth. And it was a painful truth.

Have you ever had someone who loved you tell you the truth, the painful truth? Maybe it was a parent or grandparent. A best friend, partner, or spouse. Possibly a teacher or a church member or a minister. I can recall key moments in my life when I was going down a path that was wrong, destructive, and someone loved me, loved me enough to tell

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me the truth. And then I had to make a decision. Has that ever happened to you? Or have *you* ever been the one who had to tell someone the painful truth? It's not easy, but it is the only way.

Jesus looked at the man, loved him, and told him the truth. "You're only missing one thing," he said. "Go. Sell what you own. Give the money to the poor. You'll have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." That was the painful and life-giving truth.

But Mark says the man was shocked (it can also be translated "appalled"). The man was appalled and he went away grieving, filled with sorrow. Why? Because he had so many possessions.

A seminary professor says, "To love the man, Jesus must tell him the hard truth, that his wealth is in his way. So Jesus invites him, as an act of love, to unload his burden, to give away his wealth, to free himself from that which has come to bind him, even though he has no idea he is so bound. This is love. This is the truth—and it is hard to hear." (Scott Bader-Saye, *Feasting on the Gospels: Mark*, 310.)

What is it in our lives that burdens us, binds us, and keeps us from being more faithful, loving, and joyful disciples of Christ? Maybe it's

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self-centeredness, or laziness, or fear, or lust, or arrogance. Maybe it's something else.

But of all the idols we struggle with, money and possessions are some of the most difficult for most of us, because money and possessions promise pleasure, safety, and security. "If I just have enough money, then I can do whatever I want for fun." "If I just have enough money my future will be assured and I won't have to worry."

And of course, we need to save money and be careful with money and, if we have children, teach them how to be responsible with money. But if we aren't watchful, money and possessions become our gods. "I don't have time or money for God and God's church, because I need to spend my money and enjoy my possessions." And as with all idols, ultimately we are enslaved and destroyed by them.

Jesus saw that the man was enslaved by this one idol. So Jesus took out his spiritual scalpel for surgery to save his life. But the man walked away instead.

Then Jesus looked again, this time at his disciples, and he said, "It's so hard for wealthy people to enter God's kingdom." And the

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disciples were dumbfounded. Then Jesus said, “Children, it’s hard to enter God’s kingdom. It’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God’s kingdom.” Somebody said, “Yeah, you can get a camel through the eye of a needle, but you won’t like the way it looks afterwards.”

So the disciples were even more astounded. After all, many people of the time thought that wealth was a sign of God’s favor. So if the wealthy weren’t going to enter the kingdom, how was anybody else going to make it? But Jesus said, “For mortals it’s impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

I may be wrong, but I don’t think God is calling each one of us to sell all we have and give it to the poor and then go follow Jesus. Maybe God wants some of us to do that and to know the power of that kind of existence.

But I suspect the good news for the rest of us is different. First, we’re invited to take a good long look in the mirror and ask, “No excuses. What’s holding me back from being a more faithful disciple of

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Christ? What should I be doing more of or less of to live a life more pleasing to God?"

Second, God says to all of us, "Show me the money." In other words, God calls us to do some self-examination of our relationship with money and possessions. How much of our money are we giving away, especially to God's church? Unless we're searching for a job right now or going through some sort of financial crisis, we really ought to be giving a significant percentage of money to the church. Scripture and our faith have historically suggested 10 percent. Unless we are in a financial crisis, this ought to be a realistic long-term goal. If you've been giving 1%, next year give 2 %, and so on, trying to go up each year until you reach 10%.

Why? Several reasons. To be lovingly accountable to God. To be an instrument of God's love in the world. To grow spiritually. To know the joy of generosity. To equip this church to do its ministry and to expand its staffing and outreach to the world. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have an associate pastor and a congregational nurse again?

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Stewardship Sunday is a month away, November 11. Let's do some serious thinking, praying, and committing between now and then. We don't have to be like that man who went away shocked and grieving. We know that God in Christ is offering us something wonderful—a chance to put money and possessions in their right place so that God can also be in the right place in our lives. So “Show me the money” can be such a joy. Amen. ©Jeff Paschal