

SECOND READING: SECOND READING: Mark 10:17-27

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¹⁷As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." ²¹Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money^[a] to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." ²²When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is^[b] to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It 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." ²⁶They were greatly astounded and said to one another,^[c] "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

FIRST READING: 1 Peter 4:7-10

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⁷The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. ⁸Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Be hospitable to one another without complaining. ¹⁰Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. ¹¹Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

This is word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

“Gathered and Sent: Stewards of the Kingdom” Pt 2

You know “there are critical, challenging moments in life when we are all of us asked to make important decisions”¹. We might be aware that THESE moments bear weight and significance, promise when they are happening. Then again, without the perspective of hindsight, we might not. The rich and pious young man in the gospel text this morning might or might not have EVER realized that one of these moments was happening when Jesus responded to his question. But it WAS a critical moment nevertheless when Jesus told him what he needed to do to have eternal life, to live with the qualities of heaven, deeply, fully, passionately, meaningfully in this life and the life to come. He needed to “*sell what he owned, to give his money to the poor and then follow HIM.*” The young man was “on the spot” to make a decision for the Lord. And unfortunately, HE WALKED AWAY, GRIEVING. He made his decision with his feet. He failed. You see, the man was excellent at following the rules (and Jesus loved him for diligently trying), and he was excellent at counting his pennies too, but he didn’t know that wealth in God’s kingdom doesn’t lie in rules or things, but instead in a person, Jesus Christ.

Our great joy lies IN the One who has come to free us all from our dependence on our means. Wealth is not gained in our “doing something, but in our being, in our being receptive of Jesus’s gracious and free gift of salvation, in our loosening of our grip on our own things, on our own self-sufficiency. It comes with our simply and humbly receiving Jesus’ gift of unconditional love, and then, in turn, being bearers in his Kingdom, his compassion, generosity, forgiveness, patience, love...grace to others in the world.

It’s hard to believe, really. We the church, we’re the ones to do it. We’re the ones whom Jesus has entrusted with lifting up the broken hearted, proclaiming good news to the poor, freedom to the captive. It’s the church who’s to make the world rich in love, mercy, serenity, kindness, justice.

This week I had the privilege of attending a meeting of ministers involved in the Vital Congregations Initiative. We met at Mo-Ranch, such a very beautiful place, and began to really plan the specifics regarding this exciting initiative that each of our churches are about to

¹ John Buchanan. <http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2003/101203.html> (accessed 11/7/19).

undertake. Last Spring, if you recall, our Session courageously made the decision to be part of the Vital Congregations Initiative. We are among the first wave of churches in the PCUSA, one of 20 in Mission Presbytery, to take part in this 2-year enterprise. During it, we will engage first in an honest and thorough assessment of who we are, and then we will immerse ourselves in a concentrated time of prayer and biblical conversation that will ultimately help us to discern where the Spirit is leading us ...what new thing it is that God is doing here...what bushes are burning and speaking to us. (I heard this burning bush analogy at the meeting. It supposes that on that mountain, the bush that Moses heard God speak from had been burning for a while before he noticed it. With the VCI, we'll be taking a hard look at ourselves and then becoming more able to notice the burning bushes that are in our midst)! Brothers and sisters, FPC is already a vital church, a very spiritually alive church, but God has put this initiative opportunity in front of us, and when that happens, well, you really have to say "Yes". You can't walk away, grieving. It's one of those critical moments and it requires a faithful answer. It's exciting. Maybe one of the most exciting things I've ever done in ministry. And it will officially begin after the new year. Stay tuned.

But TODAY, we also have the opportunity, each of us, as individuals, to make another decision, a critical decision for the Lord too. We have the chance to do more than what we may already be doing as Kingdom bearers, as ones who show Christ's grace, compassion, generosity, forgiveness, patience, and love to others. We have the chance to give of our time, in addition to our financial support, to roll up our sleeves to the best of our abilities, within the contexts that each of us are in, and do the work of his church, gathered and scattered. Some of you are already deeply involved and may simply want to serve further in advisory roles, take something small, or serve on a prayer team. Others of you have not yet explored involvement in a Team...and well...this is a great chance....

- **The Discipleship Team** needs people to help supervise our most precious, entrusted gifts, God's children. It also needs assistance in choosing appropriate curricula for adults, youth and children in Sunday School and Bible study groups, for overseeing and supporting Youth

Group activities, for planning community educational events like our Delightful Animals

Day, Easter Egg hunt, and doing new educational programs, yet to be named. You need stop by the booth and consider signing up to be on the Discipleship Team.

- **The Administration Team** needs your help in stewarding wisely the financial aspects of the Church. Maybe you even have gifts in accounting, computer software, or management of supplies or personnel. Maybe you simply have an interest in the bottom line. If so, Administration is the Team for you.
- **Mission & Outreach Team.** Come join up here if you want to help plan the projects which so very directly bring food, toothbrushes, soap, backpacks, blankets, gas cards and so many other tangible goods to people who are in great need. Work with the larger church to do acts of peace & justice around the world, to bring worship to the elderly once a month, and distribute snacks to those waiting for care at the free clinic. There's so much more. Come.
- **The Worship team** needs you to assist in planning creative and inspiring services that bring God's people into a place of encountering the living Lord...whether these services our Sunday services or special ones like Easter & Christmas, funerals & weddings or even Christmas Pageant or Blessing of the Animals. You'll help with choirs, greeters, ushers and acolytes. Ah, maybe you'll even experience your own worship service if you volunteer to set up communion or arrange the paraments or straighten the pews on an early morning when the sun streams in and Spirit quietly blesses you in this place.
- **The Property team.** Well, there's surely something here for you, whether you advise which electrical contract is best or whether you lend a hand in cleaning the closets or fixing the sagging shelf. Like our own homes, God's house always needs some attention. Studies show that visitors make their decision to stay or not within the first 10 min of arrival and much has to do with the condition of the grounds and facilities. If you are able, sign to help.
- **Church Life team...**Most of us are aware that the wonderful fellowship meal, so critical to the health of our relationship as a family or faith, is overseen by this team, but also member

care, via the prayer chain, caring casseroles, hospital visits, card ministry, supporting our Men's and PW's groups. Consider being a part of the Church Life Team.

All of these, brothers and sisters, are opportunities for each of us, to say "Yes" as much as feasible in support of what we believe in deeply, that is, the work of this church when we are gathered together, and when we are sent as Kingdom bearers out there! Today, may be the day, that we are asked to make an important, critical decision for the Lord. As Marty Haugin's beloved new hymn sings,

**Here in this place the new light is streaming;
now is the darkness vanished away;
See in this space our fears and our dreamings
brought here to you in the light of this day.
Gather us in, the lost and forsaken; gather us in, the blind and the lame; call to us now,
and we shall awaken;
we shall arise at the sound of our name.²**

Amen.

² Marty Haugen. "Here in This Place". Written in 1979 and published by GIA Publication, Inc. 1982 In: Glory to God The Presbyterian Hymnal (Louisville: WJKP: 2013), 401.