

“But, I Tried All That, Jesus!”
B Pentecost 20, Mark 10:17-31
October 10, 2021; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
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Mark 10:17-31 – (New Revised Standard Version)

¹⁷ As 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?” ¹⁸ Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ You 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.’” ²⁰ He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” ²¹ Jesus, 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.” ²² When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³ 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!” ²⁴ And 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! ²⁵ 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.” ²⁶ They were greatly astounded and said to one another,^[c] “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

²⁸ Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” ²⁹ 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,^[d] ³⁰ 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. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

To Enter God’s Kingdom (THE MESSAGE)

¹⁷ As he went out into the street, a man came running up, greeted him with great reverence, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to get eternal life?”

¹⁸⁻¹⁹ Jesus said, “Why are you calling me good? No one is good, only God. You know the commandments: Don’t murder, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal, don’t lie, don’t cheat, honor your father and mother.”

²⁰ He said, “Teacher, I have—from my youth—kept them all!”

²¹ Jesus looked him hard in the eye—and loved him! He said, “There’s one thing left: Go sell whatever you own and give it to the poor. All your wealth will then be heavenly wealth. And come follow me.”

²² The man’s face clouded over. This was the last thing he expected to hear, and he walked off with a heavy heart. He was holding on tight to a lot of things, and not about to let go.

²³⁻²⁵ Looking at his disciples, Jesus said, “Do you have any idea how difficult it is for people who ‘have it all’ to enter God’s kingdom?” The disciples couldn’t believe what they were hearing, but Jesus kept on: “You can’t imagine how difficult. I’d say it’s easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for the rich to get into God’s kingdom.”

²⁶ *That* got their attention. “Then who has any chance at all?” they asked. ²⁷ Jesus was blunt: “No chance at all if you think you can pull it off by yourself. Every chance in the world if you let God do it.”

²⁸ Peter tried another angle: “We left everything and followed you.”

²⁹⁻³¹ Jesus said, “Mark my words, no one who sacrifices house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, land—whatever—because of me and the Message will lose out. They’ll get it all back, but multiplied many times in homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and land—but also in troubles. And then the bonus of eternal life! This is once again the Great Reversal: Many who are first will end up last, and the last first.”

I. FEELING LIKE EFFORTS ARE FUTILE?

How many pieces of life and a living feels somewhat futile these days?

“But we’ve tried that already” is one of the classic deadly lines heard around the church! Along with “We’ve always done it this way.” “We’ve never tried that before!”

We’ve all done church all these years following the plans and doing the things that churches have done for countless decades if not centuries.

Every pastor I know is feeling this sense of fruit basket upset! All the things that we’ve always done that we learned to do in seminary and how to lead a church how to plan how to do strategic visioning how to run a children and youth program that was enticing and inviting how to listen to the church growth gurus and multiply our flock.

Everything is different now, Jesus! We have followed all the steps prescribed for us and the results are not the same!

And I hear Jesus words to the rich young man: “Maybe you need to re-define wealth, success, results and what is good and what the Lord requires of you!”

“Why do you chase after bread that does not satisfy,” the Hebrew Bible reminds us.

We might be feeling confusion as we try to deal with the pandemic. “But, we tried this; we tried wearing masks and then the CDC said maybe that’s not so important so does that mean it would never was or has something changed?

We tried getting doubly vaccinated as soon as we could and then the Delta variant and other scourges showed up on the scene. We worked on protocols and understanding safety measures puzzling over the CDC guidelines in the national guidelines and what came out of the White House and what came out of our county and our state and they didn’t all jibe!

“We tried all those things, Jesus, and look where it’s gotten us?!”

Where do you feel that your efforts may have been in vain? But the rug seems to slip out from under your feet every time you think you’re gaining some traction?

II. WHAT MUST WE DO TO GAIN ETERNAL LIFE?

“What must we do to gain eternal life, Lord, right here right now? How do we find meaning, fulfillment in life, something we can sink our teeth into that won’t change on a daily basis?

I wonder if Jesus might say to us like he said to the seeking rich young ruler:

*Give away that which is getting in your way.

*Cast aside those pursuits that are not ultimately filling your heart.

*Give away that which is weighing you down so much that you were not able to run the race with energy and passion and joy.

*Give away or give to God that which is burdening you and keeping you stuck.

It may be material possessions or it may be something altogether different. For this story, like so many of Jesus stories and interactions with people is in itself a parable. Jesus’ conversation with the rich young man has countless lessons for us as if we were having a conversation with Jesus in our time and place.

What would Jesus say to *you* to give you the guidance you need to find that meaning satisfaction and fulfillment in life?

What would Jesus encourage you to set aside, cast off, re-define, reconsider, and reimagine about your individual life your family your community involvement and your spiritual journey in community with this congregation or anywhere? How can we as a *congregation* look toward that fulfilling joyful eternal life that is offered to us right here right now? What

preconceived notions and habits and traditional ways of doing things that we need to consider doing differently?

We've been practicing that and I think we are doing a great job of it! The Bazaar was different this year in a different month with a little different format using different rooms and we all live to tell about it!

Choir and MSG are we creating themselves into something new for this new day. CUCC Singers or something like that will be emerging soon! Come, join us!

Our team structure is evolving as we seek to do the work of the church in the most effective and efficient manner into the future in faithful ways.

This last Tuesday we had a Retreat. It was a different kind of retreat than we had ever done before in my time here at CUCC. It was not a Council retreat or a planning retreat or a staff retreat. It was a coed gathering of folks in community from inside the church outside the church who wanted to come together on a beautiful day and explore together what elephants and each other have to teach us about relationships and restoring our souls and reconciling our souls and our relationships.

That was church to me.

We had as many people gathered at the Erickson's beautiful home and grounds as we do right here today or on any Sunday morning in worship.

We gathered, we shared insights, we explored, we told stories, we broke bread, we shared lunch because someone named Rebecca forgot to bring her own lunch! And we had communal sheet cake as well! Sharing chocolate together is a sacred act!

I was on a conference clergy call the next day when we talked and cried together about how difficult it is to lead in ministry in

these uncertain times.

Budgets and volunteer burn out and low attendance at church and constant concerns about safety are the things that wake pastors in the night. But they also wake lay leaders in the night and anxiety and exhaustion are everywhere in Christ's Church.

I shared my own anxiety as I worry about our church budget and I worry about our nominating season coming up and who will step up to serve in leadership. And, I worry whether we will be able to continue meeting in person indoors through the winter with COVID cases are rising around us. And, I am concerned about dear ones aging and passing and moving away, who have been the backbone of our church for many years.

But I also shared the *joy* I was feeling about two things that happened just this week!

*Conversations That Matter started a new season on Sunday afternoon, Oct. 3, with a *big* circle filling the room of folks known and not yet known in our community! Many folks came together right here in our midst to talk in a safe and open space about things that truly matter to us.

*And then the Retreat on Tuesday, that had as many gathered as our worship services, said to me that this is something to pay attention to! That the Holy Spirit is living and moving and breathing and working among us! That's something is happening here in our midst

PRAYER: Glorious Creator, we begin our day with Gratitude—Capital G! You have surrounded us with incredible beauty—outdoors full of color and indoors surrounded by warm hearts. Remind us to give away anything that gets in the way of experiencing eternal, spiritually-fulfilling Life, right here and now. Show us what is getting in the way—in our fears, thoughts and expectations—of opening ourselves to the Path you have for us. As individual and communal followers of Jesus. We are your People, called forth into your Purpose. Amen.