

## Pastor Roy's sermon from October 14, 2018

Children: Joseph collected all the extra food not to keep it for himself but to provide for everyone who would need food during the famine. Sharing...What do you like to share?

A man with many possessions asks Jesus how he can inherit eternal life. Another way of translating “eternal life” is “life of the ages.” The life of eternity. He is asking, “How can I truly live, and for all time?” Jesus reminds him of the commandments--which he has taken seriously and kept. Jesus then tells him to give his many possessions to the poor and follow him. Mind you, Jesus does not tell him to give his money to Jesus, but to the poor. By doing that he would be giving with perfect freedom and no strings attached—he would gain no advantage over anyone by his generosity. But he just can't do it.

He walks away sad and weighed down with responsibility. He isn't a bad person, he is a good person. The Gospels reveal that Jesus loved freely, but this passage comes right out and says that Jesus loved him. It's as if Jesus knows this man can be a great kingdom person—living in full joy. He knows what would happen if this man were to put **all** of his energy into following Jesus—to proclaim the good news in word and action. Perhaps he could also tell that this man would truly benefit from letting go of the responsibility of all that stuff. He could do better with his life.

But the man probably felt it would be irresponsible to behave as Jesus asks him to behave. He has this responsibility to mind the stuff that he has inherited. That is his family responsibility. Perhaps he had a wife and children? How could he do that? It was his job. Either way, he doesn't feel free to give away the wealth passed down from his father and grandfather. In Jesus' day wealth was either inherited or stolen. That's why tax collectors were despised, they got rich over and above what they collected for Rome.

It appears Jesus has a different agenda than the man. He and his disciples sacrificed. And we know virtually nothing about their families.

This man will spend the rest of his life taking care of stuff that will outlive him. If we truly listen to this encounter, our lives can be changed. We might think of this passage as a test of the man's willingness to give up all for God. A test of his highest priority. But Jesus doesn't seem interested in theoretical tests here or asking everyone to do the same thing.

He wants this man to be free. He wants the very best for him. He is so close. And he walks away. I don't think today's gospel is asking us all to take vows of poverty. Jesus holds the door of freedom open for the man with much stuff, he looks down the hallway longingly, to taste this freedom Jesus offers, but he just can't step through. Such sadness as he walks away. Such potential for freedom and friendship.

I think this lesson is inviting us to also look through the door of freedom and to ask questions. This is prayer. To still ourselves, and listen to the Spirit speaking. What prevents me from being faithfully free? How much energy do I invest in outcomes that I will never control, but live as if do?

How shall I invest my life? What are my gifts and opportunities? What are my assumptions about what is best for myself and my family? What would it feel like to be free of unnecessary burdens and control? The true answers to these questions can only come from prayer. Silence and conversation with God. Listening with faith. Free to make mistakes and find grace along the way. God is calling us to freedom and mercy. Will we step through the door of prayer and follow anew the path of freedom and generosity into which God is calling us?

Thanks be to God.