

Letting Go

By the Rev. Derek Elphick

"But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions..." (Mark 10:22).

1. OUR WORLDLY POSSESSIONS

[Family talk - what would you put in this big bag?]

E.g. Moving van - contained all our worldly, earthly possessions...

It's an obvious but poignant fact that we enter this world without any physical possessions...

and we will leave this world without any physical possessions.

Of course, in the intervening years we acquire many possessions,

a good portion of which are purchased out of necessity (and some for our personal enjoyment and pleasure)

We're starting out today thinking about our "relationship" to our physical belongings...

- it brings up ideas of "attachment" & "ownership"

- for some, more "stuff" the better

- for others, the less "stuff" the better

- there's a psychology behind this - e.g. popular right now, simplifying/decluttering "movement"

- and, perhaps as no surprise, there's a spiritual lesson to this topic which is the underlying reason for today's sermon...

2. OUR SENSE OF OWNERSHIP

We live in a physical world

which requires the acquisition of physical objects like
 food, clothing, and shelter...
 in order to live, work and play.

But we're not just physical beings...

and this world that we live in is not the "last act"

...our final destination.

The whole *thrust* of the Lord's Word is that we've been created by the Lord to occupy a *different* world.

We have a spirit, a mind,
 that connects us to this vast, eternal realm.

As a result, we also acquire non-physical things like...

- ideas and loves
- memories and experiences
- longings and desires
- hopes and dreams

And unlike physical possessions, these "acquisitions" go with us to the other side.

We read about this in one of readings today:

"In the spiritual world...we see the way we used to, we hear and talk the way we used to; we smell and taste and feel things the way we used to...we want, wish, crave, think, ponder, are moved, love, and intend the way we used to...to the point it would be inaccurate to say that we have lost anything of our own after death" (HH 461).

We are making "acquisitions" the whole time...

- this is what "buying" and "selling" represents in the Word
 - storing up natural "treasures" on earth
 - storing up spiritual "treasures" in heaven

And these "acquisitions" are based on what we value...

- what we consider to be important

3. THE RICH YOUNG RULER EXPLAINED

The man in our story wasn't ready to let go of his possessions.

"Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (v. 10)

Lord: "keep the commandments..."

Young man: "I've done this since my youth."

He was doing a lot of things right

...keeping the Ten Commandments from his youth

Lord, loved him for that...

but he still *"lacked one thing"* (v. 21).

He needed to "sell" all that he had and give to the poor...**because by doing this he'd be storing up treasures in heaven!**

- But this he couldn't do because he had "great" possessions.
- He had kept his *outward* life in order

- doing all the right things
- but the "selling" part had to do with "heart" stuff
 - internal change
(...where all of our angst & unrest reside)
 - "eating away" at us - deep unhappiness

There's something inside us that we need to let go of...

This isn't a story about shunning or frowning upon material wealth and prosperity...(see Life 66)

(Long (monastic) tradition in most religions that money & possessions are the work of the devil and that the only path toward salvation rests in literally separating yourself from the world).

It's about taking a good, hard look at what types of things we "set our heart on," what's of value, importance to us...

Specifically, it's about letting go of the things in our lives that we discover are *obstructing* our clear view of heaven.

*"So that we may be led from a state of the 'old' to the 'new,' **material passions and delights have to be cast aside** and heavenly affections assumed..." (AC 4063).*

And the whole point/focus of the story of the Rich Young Ruler begins with the question,

"What should I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17)

How, in this world of many distractions...

- of many competing influences
- of many competing values
- ...do I keep "heaven" as my focus?

4. LETTING GO

The world is a wonderful place.
It has so much to offer...

It's not a bad place...

But evil spirits will *use* the delights and pleasures of this world to...

distort, manipulate, and twist our faith and confidence in the Lord.

Note: something we may not realize about the depressing, negative influences in our lives, namely the presence of evil spirits, is that they are not *spiritual* people...

They are worldly, materialistic, sense-oriented meaning...
- they have no interest in spiritual truths
- they want us "locked" into a purely natural mindset

They want us to

"Lay up" treasures on earth (instead of those in heaven)

- want us to fixate/attach ourselves to...

...thoughts & ideas, attitudes that

...erode our sense of trust in the Lord

...erode our belief in the afterlife

They want us to become attached to

a "rich," self-serving mind-set

one that forms opinions/decisions on sensory evidence, on only that which we can touch, see and feel with our physical senses...making us...

- impatient, unwilling to wait
- all about the "here and now"
- getting what we want

This is what the Lord meant when he said,

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24).

The impossibility of thinking we can use physical, sensory evidence to find our way to God (see AC 128) - which is another way of saying, finding our way to happiness.

Evil spirits try to convince us this world is all we've got...

As a result, they instill in us...

- a fear of the future
- a fear of growing old
- nostalgic longing for the past
(the good old days are not as good as we think)
- a fear of losing control

These are things that make us, like the Rich Young Ruler, sorrowful

And this is why the Lord tells the parable of the Pearl of Great Price...

"The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he has found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:45-46).

The person in the story "sells" all that he has to purchase a beautiful pearl...

pearl = the most valuable knowledge available to us
KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE LORD (AR 727)

- truths about heaven

- the life of charity & faith (AC 2967)
- life-saving truths of the Word

5. TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME

Let us unabashedly "sell" all that is self-serving, impatient, short-sighted

Let go of those "riches."

Take up your cross = act on principle

It's being prepared to battle against appearances of this world

...and continue following the Lord.

In our reading today, we learned how the Lord uses "***countless means known to Him alone***" (AC 4063) to move us

from our old self, old ways,
to a new way

Let us remember where the real treasures in life reside...

"A person is not a human being from the body but from the spirit; for it is the spirit that thinks in a person..." (HH 445).

In letting go, we don't lose anything of real, lasting importance.

Only letting go of worldly thoughts, attitudes, "attachments"

- that are holding us back, making us fearful
- holding us back from the real joys in life
- the simple pleasures, a life of service & use

The real, lasting treasures in life are our relationships

- relationship to the Lord, His Word, each other
- these relationships are eternal

- we take them with us to the other side
- nothing is lost

So let us lay-up treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroy, for where our treasure is, there our heart will be also.

AMEN.

Lessons: Mark 10:17-22; AC 4063:2-3; HH 461