

Lectionary Scriptures
in message / liturgy:

Mark 10:17-31

2,275 words

Additional Scripture
references:

Matthew 17:20-21
Acts 2:45
Matthew 6:28-29

Key songs:

VU 519 Sing To the Lord of Harvest
MV 185 Ev'ry Day is a Day of Thanksgiving
VU 516 Come, You Thankful People, Come
VU 218 We Praise You, O God

Additional music:

Thanks Be To God (Judy Hunnicutt)
What God Can Do (Besig & Price)

Thanks Giving

There's a story going around the Internet about a businessman who was sitting by the beach in a small Brazilian village. As he sat, he saw a Brazilian fisherman rowing a small boat towards the shore having caught quite a few big fish.

The businessman was impressed and asked the fisherman, "How long does it take you to catch so many fish?"

The fisherman replied, "Oh, just a short while."

The businessman was astonished. "Then why don't you stay longer at sea and catch even more?"

“This is enough to feed my whole family,” the fisherman said.

The businessman then asked, “So, what do you do for the rest of the day?”

The fisherman replied, “Well, I usually wake up early in the morning, go out to sea and catch a few fish, then go back and play with my kids. In the afternoon, my wife and I take a nap, and when evening comes, I join my buddies in the village for a drink — we play guitar, sing and dance throughout the night.”

The businessman offered a suggestion to the fisherman. “I am a PhD in business management. I could help you to become a more successful person. From now on, you should spend more time at sea and try to catch as many fish as possible. When you have saved enough money, you could buy a bigger boat and catch even more fish. Soon you will be able to afford to buy more boats, set up your own company, your own production plant for canned food and distribution network. By then, you will have moved out of this village and to Sao Paulo, where you can set up HQ to manage your other branches.”

The fisherman asked, “And after that?”

The businessman laughs heartily, “After that, you can live like a king in your own house, and when the time is right, you can go public and float your shares in the Stock Exchange, and you will be rich.”

The fisherman asks, “And after that?”

The businessman says, “After that, you can finally retire, you can move to a house by the fishing village, wake up early in the morning, catch a few fish, then return home to play with kids, have a nice afternoon nap with your wife, and when evening comes, you can join your buddies for a drink, play the guitar, sing and dance throughout the night!”

The fisherman was puzzled, and said “Isn’t that what I am doing now?”

The fisherman knew the value of what he had in his life.

He had what he needed, and wasn’t interested in having more, because he understood that he already had everything essential and a good quality of life.

Author Kurt Vonnegut and his friend and fellow author, Joseph Heller, once were invited to a party at a billionaire’s mansion in Shelter Island, New York.

They walked in and found themselves in a room filled with artwork by the likes of Monet and Picasso, like an art gallery.

Vonnegut turned to Heller and asked, “How does it make you feel that our host only yesterday may have made more money than your novel, Catch-22, earned in its entire history?”

Heller replied, “Yeah, but I have something he doesn’t have.”

“What’s that?” Vonnegut asked.

Heller replied, “I have enough.”

Just like the fisherman, Heller already had what he needed. He didn’t need to surround himself with expensive artwork, and he didn’t need to do those things that would allow him to live that kind of lifestyle. Joseph Heller was true to his craft, and used his God-given talent as a writer to write novels that have endured the test of time.

He didn’t need more than that. He had enough.

I think sometimes it's easy to forget that we have enough. And in fact, we truly have more than enough, most of the time. And even those times when we don't think we have enough, it's often because we haven't properly calculated the value of what we have.

Not the financial value – the emotional and spiritual value.

Most of us have a nice place to live – and by the standards of some parts of the world, we truly live in mansions.

Most of us have enough to eat – in fact, we have so much that the Town comes around every week to collect green bins that are, in many cases, full of food that wasn't eaten.

In Matthew 6:28 and 29 we read *“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.”*

We have clothing – and usually enough money to buy clothing that suits our fashion sense or fashion whim. Fashionable clothing is, of course, not a necessity – we need clothing that protects us from the elements and clothes us in modesty. But I don't see anyone here dressed in sackcloth – we all can afford clothing that suits our wants as well as our needs.

We have warmth – and the odd time that we don't, usually because the furnace broke down, we have somebody we can call to fix it – usually in a few hours – and usually the resources to get it done. And we live in a place where every house is well insulated and comes with a reliable furnace, and where we have access to jobs that usually give us the money to fix the furnace when it breaks down and pay the gas bill.

Now that doesn't mean there aren't times of want. Louise bravely told her story last week about low times in her life, and the challenges she faced.

But even then, although she had many challenges, and didn't know how she could go on - in the end, things worked out.

So she told a story of somebody stuck in the depths of despair, like Job, and yet, she and her family still survived - and turned out to be pillars of the community.

Perhaps not always comfortably, and with lots of worry - but in the end, God provided enough for her and the boys. A job, even if an uncertain one - someone to help in time of dire need - and suitable shelter and weather decent enough that nobody froze, even when the furnace was turned off for months.

God ensured that she had enough.

A reason for giving thanks, indeed.

In our reading from Mark this morning, we heard the story of Jesus talking to the rich man:

21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money 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 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, "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."

Is this a condemnation of wealth? No, it isn't.

People think that this story is meant to shame rich people, or to imply that Jesus' followers must be poor.

But that isn't the point.

The point is this: the wealth that you have needs to be used for Godly purposes.

Now sometimes, that purpose is surviving. If you need a roof over your head, you need to pay for that somehow. If you need food, either you need to grow it yourself, or buy it from somewhere.

But maybe you don't need a Monet or a Picasso.

Although there is a place in the world for Monets and Picassos as well. Those painters used their God-given talent to create beautiful works of art.

But it may be a misuse of resources to buy a collection of them to keep in your house, if your purpose is simply to say to the world "I have enough money to buy these very expensive paintings."

If you do that - perhaps you're the rich man in the Gospel story.

Jesus told the man two things, and in a nutshell, it was this:

Number one - help the poor.

Number two - follow me.

It was the man's reaction that tells the tale. He went away grieving, for he had many possessions - and the implication is that he didn't want to sell them to help the poor. He wanted them for himself. He was like Vonnegut and Heller's host.

Mahatma Gandhi summed it up when he said "There's enough in this world for every man's need, but not for every man's greed."

So today we celebrate thanksgiving. What is it that we are thankful for?

We often think about the things we have. We are thankful for having a nice place to live, and having lots of food on the table.

And, in Gandhi's words, there's enough in the world for us to have what we need.

But how often are we thankful that we have enough?

And, truly, we have more than enough.

I wanted to do something different this year for decorating the table for Thanksgiving, to underline the idea that out of our surplus wealth, someone else's necessity can be satisfied.

So we asked people to bring in donations for the Exchange that can be displayed here today, but then can be donated to help those who need them.

That way, everyone can have enough.

And even if we had to sacrifice to bring those things in, I doubt any of us will starve tomorrow because of it.

This was Jesus' point - not that having things is bad. Not that working at a good job and earning good money is bad. Not that having access to more than we need is bad.

It's only bad if we ignore the call to help others.

And that's another thing we can be thankful for this Thanksgiving.

At one time or another, we've all been helped by somebody. That was an important part of Louise's story last week.

And it's an essential part of the Footprints poem we've talked about a couple of times now. It's the idea that, at the lowest points in our life, if we have even a speck of faith, help will come. Someone will carry us.

In Matthew chapter 17, verses 20 and 21, we read:

"For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."

If you have faith the size of a mustard seed - which is very small, about 1 millimetre in diameter - you can make a mountain move.

Perhaps not a real mountain - mainly because God designed them to be immovable. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, and in this

parable, the “mountain” is whatever is challenging you in your life, and the more seemingly impossible, the better.

As we heard at the end of the Gospel reading from Mark this morning, "*For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.*"

That's what happens when you have faith. Things you couldn't see happening become possible.

But it takes more than faith.

We could all sit around here all day and discuss our faith, and reinforce each other's faith, and build ourselves up to believe that all things are possible.

But would that make those things happen?

Of course not.

Faith is important... but it's the fact that faith calls us to action that makes things happen.

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, 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.

That's a bit odd. Who needs a hundredfold houses? And who wants a hundredfold persecutions?

When Jesus promises a hundredfold houses, He doesn't mean all Christians will become real estate magnates. He is referring to the community of the church

which is designed to share. In Acts 2:45 we read “They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.”

And likewise, the persecutions are shared. The community of the church has broad shoulders, and helps us weather the storm.

So, to me, that says that when we have faith and follow Jesus, we are blessed both with enough for us and with enough that we can share.

And when we help others, that’s what we’re doing.

We are sharing that which we have been given.

It didn’t come from us. It doesn’t belong to us. It is a gift from God.

When we give thanks, it is important to understand why we’re thankful.

Are we thankful because we have “stuff”?

Or are we thankful because we have enough?

Enough for us, and enough to share.

Thanks be to God.