

Stuff

Some Sundays you show up at church and hear a gospel lesson that makes you want to run screaming for the exit door!

If today's encounter with Jesus sent the poor sap in the story walking away "shocked and grieving, because he had many possessions" – what's it say about us?

How many of us here today have spent, are spending or will spend, hundreds of hours cleaning up after loved ones who have passed away?

It's not only folks caught up in the never ending cycle of hoarding who hear this lesson with shock and horror, it's all of us frankly.

While 100 years ago we were called "citizens," these days we are defined as "consumers."

In this wealthiest nation on the planet, if we stop buying, the economy stops functioning and the whole shebang goes down the toilet.

How do we square our faith with our social reality?

Or to put a finer point on it: what do we do with Jesus?

I'll tell you what we've done.

We've made him over in our own image, and put the real Jesus up in the attic, hoping against hope that he'll stay put and stop bothering us.

We've turned Jesus into a muscled out Rambo wearing the American flag as he supports our wars and justifies our economic inequality, as we recite the opening words of the gospel in our times:

"God helps those who help themselves."

Which, as you know, isn't the gospel, it's Ben Franklin.

Or we've turned Jesus into a personal savior, who, so long as I recite the right words, will save my butt when the time comes.

And the rest of humanity?

Sorry, you're on your own!

And with our redefined and now safe Jesus, we blame the poor for their plight, and if they're into drugs or booze or violence, why, then it's case closed, slam the door, good luck getting your life together buddy, but don't bother me till you do.

We have created a Jesus who's at home in the country club scene, who blesses our wars and our bigotries, our misogyny and racism.

Harsh, I know.

But not for the sake of being harsh.

It's for the sake of seeing where we are, since only then might we sneak back into the attic and at long last meet the real Jesus, the only one who can help us become whom we've always been meant to be.

The fact is, you know the real Jesus.

He's all about surrender and trust, he's all about letting go.

He begins with the simple things: like letting go of our angers and resentments, then moving on to letting go of our need for power and control, then letting go of our fears and insecurities; until we get to today, when he invites us into the hardest letting go of all: letting go of our dough, our stuff, our beloved possessions.

It's the toughest of all the "lettings go" to swallow because we've been born and bred to see that in our stuff, and especially in our cash, is our freedom.

With my loot, I can choose where I want to live, how I want to live, what I want to eat and with whom I wish to eat it, where I might vacation and where I might live out my last days.

Do you notice the common denominator?

It's all about me!

Our obsessions with self aren't something you and I created; it's the world we're born and raised in, the air we breathe, the water we drink.

In our lifetimes, we've even watched it play out in the magazines we've grown up with.

We older folks remember Life magazine.

Life!

What could be broader and more inclusive?

Then came People magazine.

Certainly people are a part of life, but people aren't all of life, so the road narrows.

Then came Us.

And while us is people too, it's not all people, it's only Us.

Finally, and of course it had to happen, came the magazine Self!

There's just one more magazine left, arriving any day now, it's called: Me!

It's just pages of tin foil — so I can gaze all day at my favorite subject!
Noel Paul Stokey.

This is our condition.

And it is in this terminal condition that we approach Jesus today, the real one, not the Rambo one, and fall to our knees, and ask, "how may I inherit eternal life?"

Eternal life meaning NOT what happens after we die, not life strumming a harp on a cloud; but eternal life as living into the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom totally at odds with the world we have created.

And Jesus does what Jesus does — he changes our focus from one absorbed with self (how do I gain eternal life?) to one concerned with others (give your stuff away and come, follow me).

Last week, Jesus is challenged about divorce, and he responds by talking about marriage.

He's asked about rules, but he replies by reflecting upon God's dream for us.

Soon he'll be asked "who is my neighbor" only to respond that the better question is, "to whom am I a neighbor?"

Do you see what's happening?

If we want real life, the life of freedom and peace and joy that only God can give, then everything we think we know about everything — and especially everything we think we know about money, has to metanoia, turn around, think again.

And frankly, the luxury we've had all these years of refusing to make those changes is coming to an end.

Just this week, scientists from around the world brought home the sobering news that the global climate change we thought we could foist upon our great grandchildren, is now likely to come home to roost within a decade — well within our lifetime.

It's so urgent that even long time climate change deniers like Exxon are reportedly pushing for carbon tax legislation.

Climate change is a reality caused precisely by our refusal to let go of our stuff — since we know how to turn it around — but the objection is, it'll cost too much.

And yet if we don't, millions will suffer and die as drought, starvation, and even the massive flooding of coastal cities will be our new reality.

The horrific storm that devastated Florida this week is just a foretaste of what's coming.

Perhaps what Jesus is inviting us into this morning is a freedom so wonderful that it frightens us.

Imagine a world where nothing is mine, but everything is ours.

Imagine a world where 77 people do not own the same amount of wealth as half the world's population, but that everything is shared in common, and all for the common good.

You may say this is an impossible pipe dream.

Yet we live in a world of 2 billion Christians.

What might happen if we started to act like it?

What power to change how things are into how things might become could emerge if 2 billion people begin to follow the Jesus **who is** — rather than the Jesus we have created?

As we head into these dangerous times, we aren't alone; we move with the assurance that "the word of God is living and active," meaning, that God is near, working among us, molding us, challenging us, encouraging us to be the good stewards of this earth that we are meant to be.

And that word is "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow;" meaning, that while we can

and do often fool one another, and ourselves, Truth won't be forever mocked, Truth will be known and shine its light in all the dark places.

As the prophet Amos exhorts us today,

"You talk about God being your best friend, then live like it!

...Love good, and then work it out in the public square.

Perhaps God will notice, and be gracious..." Amos, 5:14-15. The Message.

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