

The Wymersley Benefice of Cogenhoe and Great Houghton
and Little Houghton with Brafield on the Green

Sermon 10 October 2021, Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity

Reading: Mark 10: 17-31

Rev'd Irene Cobley

I was thinking the other day about the things that Jesus preached about most, and they're pretty obvious really. Love God. Love one another. Love your neighbour as yourself. He also talked a lot about the kingdom of God and the promise of eternal life – our inheritance, if we believe in him. Our inheritance, a strange word to use. After all, doesn't someone have to die for another person to receive an inheritance?

But there is the message of Jesus in a nutshell and we've heard it over and over again. It's the story of the scriptures, we read it in our bibles or hear it read week after week in church, then you hear myself, Eddie or Jenny put our interpretation on the words.

The young man in today's Gospel has learned about the promise of eternal life since his youth, the same promise made to Abraham, Isaac and all his ancestors who fled through the red sea and into the wilderness in search of the promised land. He hears the promise again, directly from Jesus, and he wants some of that life that only God can give.

Here is a man who is used to having what he wants, he has lots of stuff, he is wealthy, he knows the scriptures and the commandments and he lives in the right way but, and it's a big but; something is missing from his life. Despite his wealth, he is spiritually poor, despite his life being full, he feels empty, and we see an urgency in him as he runs to Jesus to ask, "What must **I do** to inherit eternal life?" He almost sounds desperate! It's as if he has reached a stage in his life when he has achieved everything he wants, yet he feels an inner restlessness, a feeling that there is something missing but he can't put his finger on what it is.

I dare say we all have moments like this when we are silently searching for something almost intangible, we can't touch it or see it but we know it's there. We've done the earthly things, we've worked hard, perhaps brought up families, or are still doing so, we live a good life, come to church and say our prayers and we support the community, but something is missing. So, we echo the man's question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus, looks at the young man and says, without rancour, "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."

Ooh! You can almost feel the man's pain! He wasn't expecting that, and to be honest are any of us? On the one side we have our wealth, status, possessions, whatever else you like to hold on to, and on the other side we have the promise of eternal life, but that comes at a cost and the cost comes in letting go of all things that hold us back from following God.

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I spoke earlier of our “inheritance” the word used when talking about eternal life, Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice and died for us to give us that inheritance, so surely we should dispense with all that is unnecessary in our lives to follow Jesus, that is the way of the cross, respectability and possessions are not enough. Ultimately, that is what the young man in the story, and we ourselves, struggle with. The issue here is one of commitment, are we happy to do as little as possible to be a Christian, or are we willing to go the extra mile and make sacrifices for our love of God?

This Gospel story is more about life than money, Jesus is not against people having wealth happiness and a good life, but what he says is those things should not define us, trap us or possess us to the exclusion of the world around us. For the abundance and the knowledge we have, we should rejoice, but we should also be acutely aware of those who do not have a fraction of that, nor any hope of achieving it, through no fault of their own.

I heard a wonderful expression the other day, “Too many people are looking for a hearse with a trailer attached” wanting to take their wealth and possessions with them in their desire to hold on to them – rather like the Pharaohs of old. Who will benefit from that?

The reality of life is that one day we are all going to die, we came into the world with nothing and so we shall leave it. It might be next week, five years, twenty years, only God knows. So, treat each day as if it will be your last, rejoice in the life you have whilst doing as much good as you can in your community and the world beyond. The world and all that is in it does not belong to you, you are stewards just passing through so give freely to those in need whatever way you can; in the knowledge that your life spent on this earth will have made a difference to people worse off than yourself, copying the example of Jesus who taught us that being a Christian is not an easy ride. Being a Christian is sacrificial.