

Get a Real Grip

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time year B

Mark 10:17-30

We continue our reading of Mark's gospel, chapter 10.

We have a very moving encounter,
and a puzzling discourse.

Jesus goes on and on about how hard it is

for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God;

then to say that if we give everything to God,

we will receive a hundred times more—which, in my book, means
that it will only get harder to enter the kingdom of God.

Where is my logic faulty?

Aaah: unless the hundred times more is of a different order.

Ok Ok: not a hundred houses and wives; I get it.

The encounter begins strangely.

The encounter begins with Jesus throwing a curve ball.

Is it just me taking notice or have the gospels these past weeks
highlight how little like straight answers?

Have you noticed: Jesus does not give straight answers.

A simple, albeit *grave*, question about eternal life is posed,
a question which Jesus could answer straight.

Instead, we get

“Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone?”

“Jesus: just accept the compliment, and answer the question!”

Not only is the initial response strange,

but so is the entire order which Jesus follows to engage this man,
hungry for eternal life, is somewhat unusual.

It is all very strange—amazing but strange.

Jesus gives his surprising response, turning this man's gaze towards God:
an initial focus

(this man does not yet know Jesus as God, but as a good teacher).

Then, Jesus proceeds to list the commandments,

but only those with respect to *neighbor*, not those with respect to God.

Why is this?

It seems that Jesus is meeting this man on his turf.

This man thinks in terms of *doing*, doing so to “inherit” or *merit* eternal life.

Jesus accepts that this is a good start, and enumerates the more tangible *doings* of the Law: what we are called to *do* to neighbor. But Jesus is to lead him beyond any doing, and beyond any notion of merit. The man proudly responds

that he has observed these commandments regarding neighbor.
This is our story.

“Jesus, look, look: I’ve been a good person, and church-goer. I put money in the collection plate. I volunteer. Aren’t you proud?”

What does Jesus surprisingly do to this man and to us?
Jesus neither congratulates him
nor proceeds to list the commandments regarding God
—which one might expect.

Jesus *looks* at him and *loves* him.

How amazing! How awesome!

We rarely think of the power of Jesus’ gaze,
of how He gazes upon us, and, in so doing, *loves* us...

Jesus loves him, and in that pouring forth of love, invites the man to let go.

The order is very important: *being loved and thus freed to let go.*

Jesus is trying to lead this man to the discovery and experience of
the *gift* of eternal life had in *relationship* with God.

To enter into relationship with God
and therein receive the gift of eternal life, we must let go,
let go of anything to which we cling with an excessively tight grip.
In the case of this man, it begins with his possessions.

At Jesus’ invitation, however, **“his face fell, and he went away sad.”**

How sad.

His grip was too tight.

He was unable to receive anything beyond what he possessed.

Jesus then turns to the disciples
who are struggling with the same questions.

“How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!”

In other words, how hard it is to let go

—of possessions, of ideas, of relationships...

I think most of us would agree.

But surrender is paramount.

God wishes to give so much more than we can acquire
or ever possess on our own.

And our hands, our *hearts* must be open
so that the gift can be bestowed.

God wants to give us *everything*:

- the man speaks of *eternal life*
- Jesus speaks of *the kingdom of God*
- the disciples speak of *salvation*

All of these essentially signify God's very life—*everything*.
God's life is ours for the receiving.

Surrender, letting go...

Jesus knows we struggle to do this.

Know, however, that Jesus is not preaching Buddhist detachment.

Jesus is not preaching a certain level of indifference,
so to avoid problems of attachment.

Everything that Jesus says *follows* being loved by Him.

Jesus is preaching the freedom of being loved by the One who is *the Good*.

God first loves us.

And when we are in relationship with God, with Christ, we are free.

We cherish and enjoy life, but we do so as persons already deeply satisfied.

Thus, for those experiencing such divine intimacy,
there is no self-medicating!

Well: there can be struggles because of our brokenness,
but there is still a satisfaction deep in the heart.

Jesus assuages any worry on the part of the disciples

who do not understand the gratuitousness of God's sharing Himself with us.

“All things are possible for God.”

He declares that whatever we surrender to Him

(without, of course, shirking any responsibilities),

can only lead to a hundredfold being bestowed,

that is, much greater satisfaction, and the fullness thereof in the age to come.

And because it is matter of *gift* and not *doing*,

many who are first in terms of doing will find themselves last,

and many who struggle in doing, but receive, will be first.

Let us receive, aware of the difficulty we have in letting go.

Acknowledging the difficulty is already an act of letting go.

A little opening is all God needs.

“All things are possible for God.”

We can and will be free, free to love because we are loved....