

What Are We to Do?
Luke 18:18-25
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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Jesus had become a public figure. While there were moments of quiet time in prayer, occasions on which he and just those closest to him could have important conversations, so much of his time was spent surrounded by crowds. He healed. He taught. He challenged. He comforted. He received. He gave. He answered questions.

This day was no different for Jesus.

A man...we are told he was a person of means...had a question. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" he asked.

This man was a faithful Jewish person. He had known the commandments since his youth. He had every intention of following them...and from all the evidence we have, he did just that.

This man was also a person of means. Not only could he follow the commandments, but he had the means "to fulfill all ritual requirements" (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha*, footnote to Luke 18:26): to make offerings, to take care of the poor, the widows, the stranger. And there is no evidence that he wasn't doing that.

Yet on this day, he came to Jesus because he was curious in a way that he just couldn't ignore. And, sometimes we forget that. We forget to appreciate his curiosity. We forget to even consider his sincerity. Instead, we like to assume this man is somehow in the wrong. But, if we really listen, we can hear the sincere curiosity of this person.

He came to Jesus, knowing that he had done everything he was told to do, but perhaps feeling something deep inside him that said he could do more...or perhaps feeling something inside him that said following the rules wasn't all there is...or perhaps just knowing that something in him was pointed in the wrong direction.

So, he came to Jesus. And he asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

And after reviewing all the things he was doing well, Jesus said to him, "There is still one thing you are lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor...then come, follow me" (Luke 18:22, NRSV).

And, if we are at all engaged in this story, we likely feel sad right alongside this man when he hears Jesus' statement. Because we can imagine what our response to that instruction would be.

After all, we - like the man - know what it is to depend on our stuff, to count on the stability that money brings us.

We know what it is to feel possessive of our possessions, maybe even to feel possessed by them.

And so often we look at this story and we concentrate on the fact that this man is called "very rich." And with that we let ourselves off the hook. We decide this is a problem for a different class of people. Or we decide that this man wasn't as good as we are anyway.

But what if, instead of allowing our discomfort with Jesus' instruction to turn us away from this story, what if we instead decided to sit with it?

What if, rather than finding our reasons why Jesus' answer to us wouldn't be the same, what if we paused to actually listen to Jesus?

Because we all know what it is to wonder what we should do. Maybe we word the question differently. Maybe our question isn't focused on eternal life. Maybe ours is simply the curiosity we experience about how we can live more faithfully and compassionately in our world today. Maybe our question is about how we can help create God's kin-dom on earth, something we are so badly in need of. Our question might be worded differently, but it likely reflects the same sincere curiosity of this man.

"What are we to do?" we ask.

What are we to do to be more faithful?

What are we to do that will help us connect more deeply with God?

What are we to do in order to live out this love of neighbor that we proclaim?

What are we to do to help make our world look more like the world God dreams?

What answer do you think *you* would hear if you asked these or similar questions to God?

Maybe the answer for us would also have to do with giving away so much that we pretend we need.

Maybe the answer for us would have to do with setting down our phones and looking up to pay attention to the world and people around us.

Maybe the answer for us would have to do with making a commitment to think of the other before we relax back into our self-serving ways.

Maybe the answer for us would have to do with forgiveness that we are slow to offer.

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Maybe the answer for us would have to do with living in ways that don't strip the earth of the very resources we celebrate.

Maybe the answer for us would have to do with learning to value the other - the stranger, the immigrant, the refugee, simply the neighbor who doesn't look like us or love like us - learning to value the other the way we value ourselves.

The reality is that the answers each of us would receive are likely to vary. After all, we are different people. But all of the answers would remind us of what we need to set down because it is getting in the way. All of our answers would encourage us to be more generous and more brave and more loving.

Because remember what was at the heart of Jesus' answer. We often get caught when we read or hear Jesus say, "Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor" (Luke 18:22) and we forget to keep reading. But that sentence ends saying, "then come, follow me" (Luke 18:22).

See that is the real challenge for us. That is the real answer to the question.

When we ask, "What are we to do?" the answer that comes in return is that...put down whatever gets in the way of loving God and neighbor...do the hard and honest work to name it and let it go...and then come and follow Jesus.

What are we to do? The answers we will hear are likely not easy. But they will move us in the direction of Jesus and in the direction of love. Amen.