

“Nothing Short of Everything”
Lent 3 The Cross-Shaped Life
Mark 10:17-27
March 15, 2020

This Lenten season we’ve been talking about building the cross-shaped life. We’ve said that, for most of us, it required a radical renovation. God wants to work a total change in us, a change that turns our faces toward the ways of God. This radical renovation teaches us a peculiar way of greatness – that is, to serve instead of seeking to be served.

This morning we look at another story of radical renovation – or at least a story that teaches us the kind of radical renovation that Jesus asks of us. And the main character – the desired learner – in this morning’s story is a “rich young ruler.” Through this story Jesus tries to help us see another part of radical renovation. He strives to teach us a new aspect of what God wants to do in us.

As I just mentioned, one of the main characters in this story from Mark chapter 10 is typically referred to as a “rich young ruler.” This story is one of a handful that appear in each of what we call the “synoptic gospels” – that is Matthew, Mark and Luke. In these parallel stories Mark refers to him as a “man”; Luke says he’s a “certain ruler”; Matthew indicates that he’s young. But all three they all say he is “rich.”

Clearly this man has the big 3: position, power and possessions. By the world’s standards, he has everything going for him.

But something else is made clear by the gospel story. This “rich young ruler” is also a faithful person. He has kept all the laws – perfectly, in fact. Everyone knew he was a good man. He certainly was better than the crowd surrounding Jesus.

But this rich young ruler longed for more. Not more stuff, or things or wealth; not more power or position.

- he wanted something more spiritual
- he wanted real life in God
- he wanted the life that is really life – the life he witnessed in Jesus
- he was searching for a radical renovation

And so his question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus knows this man. He knows his strengths – knowledge of and obedience to the law. And so, after a brief exchange around the things of the law, a beautiful thing happens.

Jesus looked at him. Jesus looked at him in the same way a cardiologist looks into a person’s heart, in search of what is stopping the flow of blood. Jesus looked into this guy’s soul. Jesus wanted to see what was blocking the flow of God’s life into his own life. Jesus looked at him and Jesus loved him, and in that searching and love, Jesus found the blockage.

The diagnosis - the rich young ruler had one thing that caused the block: it was his wealth. It was not so much that he possessed so many things, but rather that his many things possessed him. He had become a slave to his big 3: position, power and possessions.

Jesus teaches us that salvation is being set free from whatever has us bound. As we learn for the rich young ruler, it was his things that bound him.

For this man the diagnosis was tough to take. It was the last thing he wanted to hear. Jesus asked of him the one thing he could not surrender. He wanted to hold tightly to his big 3, and there was no way he was going to give them up.

This story is certainly about money. Jesus, as we may know, taught often about money. This is one of those instances. But this story is not only about money.

- it’s about whatever binds us
- it’s about the block in our hearts that keep us from a full relationship with God
- it’s what we are holding back
- it’s the one thing we are not willing to give up for God

For many of us, it *is* our wealth that gets in our way of the radical renovation that God wants to accomplish in us.

But the block in our hearts can be so many things

- it might be our position, power, or possessions
- or it might be one of the other p’s: pride, prestige, prejudice
- it might be addictions that are taking your life, or the life of one you love

- it might be a victim mentality that comes from a memory of past hurts and emotional abuse
- it might be an over commitment to our careers
- it might be racial, cultural or political bias
- it might be the way you use your time, energy and resources
- it might be the places you go
- it might be the sites you visit on the internet

I don't know what the one thing is for you, but I do know that Jesus is looking deep into your heart. I do know that Jesus loves you. And I do know that the blockage needs to be removed. Radical renovation to live the cross-shaped life is dependent on your willingness to surrender that one thing.

You see, the rich young ruler lacked an ability to surrender fully to God. He held back a part of his life – his wealth - in his unwillingness to surrender every aspect of his life to God. In doing so he blocked the flow of the very thing for which he longed: the rich life with God.

God calls us to surrender nothing short of everything.

There's a saying in sports: "Leave it all on the field." I understand that. It's about giving every ounce of yourself to the game. It's about coming to the end of the game and being able to say that you had nothing more to give - you left all your energy, talents and abilities on the field. In other words, you surrendered your whole self to the game.

Jesus called the rich young ruler to leave it all on the field:

- to surrender nothing short of everything
- to surrender all that he was to the transforming power of God
- to surrender not only how he lived his life with respect to the rules of the faith, but also to surrender all that he had
- not to give them up, but to surrender them to God
- to surrender his big 3: position, power, and possessions

It's the same big 3 Oscar Schindler had developed for himself. Remember the movie Schindler's List?

Oscar Schindler wasn't much before the war. But as the war progressed, he saw his opportunity. He profited from slave labor available during WWII. He bribed his way to the top of the heap. He developed position, power, and possessions at

the expense of others. He had a nice little munitions factory full of the cheapest labor he could have in that day – Polish Jews – but all that he was and all that he had blocked the radical renovation that was necessary in his life.

In Mark's gospel the rich young ruler never surrenders. His story ends tragically. The Scripture says "When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions."

The good news is that Schindler does begin to surrender. He begins to understand what was blocking his heart. He begins to care about saving the Polish Jews rather than take advantage of them. And just before the war ends, he uses everything he has to buy the lives of as many of his factory workers as he can. He surrenders everything for that work. His accountant, Itzhak Stern, lets him know, he has nothing left.

It's the day before the end of the war. The Jews he worked so hard to save will be free tomorrow and he will be a war criminal. So in the middle of the night, he and his wife prepare to flee. Before they leave, Oscar is given a gift – a ring that has in it inscribed "He who saves one life saves the entire."

Oscar Schindler learned what it meant to surrender, to give nothing short of everything.

Are you ready for the same?

If we want the radical renovation that God offers to us then we must be willing to let Jesus look into our hearts to see and diagnosis the blockage. We must allow Jesus to love us and to remove the block from our hearts – whatever it is – however difficult it is to let go of - so that the life of God can flow in and through us.

What is it that blocks the flow of God in you?

- Can you be honest with yourself and God today?
- Do you know what keeps you from having the life that is really life in Christ Jesus?
- What can you surrender today that would radically renovate your life?
- What can you give up that would release room in your life for God to flow through you?

On the card you have in your bulletins today, I invite you to write a word or draw a picture that represents that thing you need to surrender. I'll give you a moment for that now. In the silence of these moments, let us consider what we need to surrender.

Pause

I want to invite you now to surrender those things. Come if you are willing and the Spirit is moving you. Come and surrender whatever it is that you wrote down on your card – surrender it to Jesus. Put your card in one of the baskets, in the front or the back pew, symbolic of giving it to God. Come if you are willing to surrender that thing today.

Pause

Some of you may still be holding the item you need to surrender. And that is just where you are today - and that is ok for today.

For those who surrendered an item today and for those contemplating this kind of surrender for another day...

Let us pray:

All to Jesus I surrender;
All to him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust him
In his presence daily life.

I surrender all, I surrender all,
All to thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.
Amen.