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***The problem (and power) of money***

*[Jesus told the rich man] “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.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. … [Jesus taught the disciples,] “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”* ***–Mark 10:21b-22, 25***

During a study on the passage above, a man of means asked me, “Why does Jesus hate money so much?” His family saw their money as a good thing, and he earnestly wanted to understand why Jesus seems to speak negatively of wealth again and again. For instance, there’s the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21), or Jesus’ insistence that we cannot love God and wealth (Matthew 6:24).

In fact, Jesus talks about money more than nearly anything else. Interestingly, for all his talk about money, he never asks for it. Not even once. Instead, Jesus warns us about the corrupting influence of money on our lives, minds, and souls. After all, Jesus says where our treasure is, our hearts are also (Matthew 6:21).

Wealth poses deep spiritual risks for the people of God. From Jesus’ teachings we learn that money has the power to turn us inward on ourselves -- away from loving God with all our heart and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Instead, we become more concerned with not only what we *have*, but with accumulating *more* … and more and more.

Money presents profound spiritual obstacles for the children of God. We all want full lives that brim with security, relationship, joy, peace and love. Contrary to what our world tells us, money can ensure us none of those things. They are achieved only when we have a right relationship with God, loving God with ALL our strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Accumulation of wealth gets in the way.

That was the issue with the rich man in Mark 10:17-27. Deeply religious and pious, he nonetheless worries about his eternal life. The “one thing” he lacks, Jesus tells him, can be satisfied by selling what he has and giving to the poor. Generous giving would break the bond that money has over him and re-center him on loving God and loving neighbor.

Generosity is the spiritual prescription Jesus gives the rich man, and it’s the one for us, too.

When we talk about financial stewardship in the church, it’s often about how our giving benefits the congregation and helps “meet the budget” Instead, we might teach how generous giving benefits us by breaking the chains that money has on our hearts and souls.

Bu giving generously we can help the church, our neighbor *and* ourselves. We can learn what it is to be free to love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves.

*--Rob Blezard*

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