

July 17th Jesus & the Rich Young Ruler: The Brokenness of Comfort by Pastor Jenn (Mark 10:17-31)

As many of you know being a parent is no easy task, in fact it is all trial and error- the child will try you, and you'll be making some errors. One of the areas I found trying had to do with their vocabulary because sometimes with their words, came attitude. While most children's first words are "mama" or "dada" producing great smiles on our faces, there is another word that the kids learn pretty early, and they love to use it constantly. Do you know the word? It's "No" "Won't you share your toy with your brother?"- "No" "Do you want to take a nap?" – "No" And it continues as they get older and can easily comprehend what you are saying. "Are you up yet?" – "No" "Did you clean up the living room?" – "NO" "Did you study for that test?" – "No"

Now we do know why they like to use that word so often with us, it's because they see the reaction, we give them when they use it. However, there is a solution, particularly as they get older, the key is to ask loaded questions – that is those that attempt to limit the response to fit our agenda as compared to the simple closed questions that only require a simple answer of yes or no. Instead of asking, "Won't you share your toy with your brother?" you ask it in a way that leads them to do what you think is best - like "Why don't you share your toy with your brother?" And instead of saying, "Did you clean up the living room?" try "You should clean up that living room, so I won't step on your toys and break them" that usually worked with us. Now I admit - yes, it's playing with the kids' minds, but in a good way, you are teaching them what is right- it is good to share things and clean up.

I bet in looking back on his conversation with Jesus, the rich young man wished he would have asked Jesus a closed ended question instead of the one he gave, asking "*what must I do to inherit eternal life*". If only he would have asked "Do you think I could inherit eternal life?" more than likely Jesus would have said "yes" because after all this is Jesus, who has faith in all of us, he believes nothing is impossible with God or with us (verse 27). But the rich young man *did not ask that type of question*, he asked a loaded question, assuming that since he was faithful to the law, he had an in, but instead he got a whopper of an answer. *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*"

As we continue our sermon series based on the stain glass windows, recognizing how the broken pieces tell a story and teach a lesson, we are invited to put ourselves in the place of the rich young man and recognize the call to give up our comforts in order to give our life to God. For the rich young man, it was his dependency upon his money, for you and me, the answer could be different, because as Jesus points to this man's comforts, he challenges us to consider what is it that we rely on to gratify our desires and wants? There is a self-indulgence reflection here that the gospel of Mark has been building towards. In chapter 8 of Mark's gospel, we read how Jesus tells those around him that to be his disciple they must "deny oneself and take up your cross and follow me" *Mark 8:34* After making that statement his disciples were challenged by that command. Like in chapter 9 Jesus pointed out signs of the coming kingdom, and the text says they did not understand, so Jesus called them a "*faithless generation*". Shortly after that the disciples have a discussion among themselves about who is the greatest. In response Jesus tells them "*Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it*" And in today's text he declares that "*the first will be last and the last will be first*" (v31) Mark's gospel is conveying that Jesus is asking us to prioritize. And when we do, recognize it's not going to be comfortable, but rather downright challenging.

You see this is why I love this sermon series because with each lesson of each stain glass window, it makes us stop and consider, where do I fit into this? And today's window invites us to recognize that there is a part of us that we rely on in our set ways, sometimes to the point we won't allow ourselves to rely on God or follow God's ways. I mean, did you notice the glass depicts the rich man with his hand on his hip? I don't know about you, but my experience is such gesture is stubbornness. Not wanting to change. Because let's face it, that's easiest. But the gospel is not supposed to be easy, *it's supposed to be transforming. Of your heart, your mind, your life, and your relationships, with God and with others*. The gospel of Mark has this ongoing theme: to be a disciple of Jesus: we must say "no" to some things, in order to say, "yes" to follow him.

A few years ago, I was talking to someone about the task of leadership and the struggle to help develop vision for a church. And that colleague mentioned I should be working on developing "The Big Yes" Now at first, I thought he was kidding, because I thought he was referencing the Jim Carrey movie, *Yes Man*, but he said there is a school of thought out there similar to what that movie portrays. He went on to explain that

while many people have a hard time saying “no” to requests (which we tend to do as we become adults) what we should be doing is we need to find the big Yes in our lives, that is the one thing we focus in on that defines who we are and what we want to be about, and when we have that, all other things that get in the way of keeping to that yes, are the things we can give ourselves permission to say no to.

American billionaire and philanthropist Warren Buffett agrees with this concept, he said, “The difference between successful people and very successful people is that very successful people say ‘no’ to almost everything. But there is a danger. Saying *no* is a dead-end when you don’t have a *BIG YES*. People who fight-against end up empty unless they have something to fight for. Know what you want before fighting what you don’t want.”¹

In this passage Jesus is calling us to make God the Big Yes in our lives and have everything else be based on that yes so that all the things that interfere with our relationship with God, we say no to. For the rich man, it was *his holding onto his money that stood* in the way of his big yes to God. Maybe for us it’s materialism; maybe it’s an addiction, a grudge, our pride, our fears, our worries, our jealousy. Whatever is holding us back to coming closer to God, giving our lives more fully to God, Jesus tells us say no to all that. Say no to the materialism, the grudges, the pride, the fears and worries, the jealousy and say Yes to God, to allow God to work in and through our lives for a blessing for ourselves and others.

In another gospel lesson we learn of a story of what could have been for the rich young man if he would have made God his Big Yes. We’ve talked about Zacchaeus before, and so you will remember he was a rich tax collector, taking money for Rome and himself. But when Jesus came to Jericho, Zacchaeus wanted to see him. Being of short stature, he climbed a sycamore tree in order to view Jesus and *Jesus saw him* and said in Luke 19:5, ‘Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.’ Zacchaeus went looking for Jesus when Jesus was looking for him. Jesus made Zacchaeus his yes that day and that moved *Zacchaeus* that in Luke 19:8 we read, Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, ‘Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.’ And Jesus responded in verse 9 “Today salvation has come to this house” That day Zacchaeus said yes to God, yes to sharing his resources with others, yes to righting his wrongs, yes to being saved by Jesus *for a life* blessed in God’s name. That’s all that Jesus wants for any of us. Saying the big yes to God, yes to sharing with others, yes to righting our wrongs, yes to being saved by God for a life blessed in Jesus’ name.

This week my friends, when you face the challenges of choices and decisions that can or will interfere with your time, your gifts, your relationships, may you recall that each and every day God says yes to you, yes to hearing your prayers, yes to helping through Jesus, yes to guiding you through the Spirit. May we in return say yes to the will of God even if it takes us out of our comfort zone, because as this window reminds us, to say yes to God is to say yes to Jesus, who saves and redeems us all.

Let’s pray: *God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change;*

courage to change the things we can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time;

accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;

taking this sinful world as it is, not as we would have it;

trusting that You will make all things right if we surrender to Your Will;

that we may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You

forever in the next. - Reinhold Niebuhr

¹ [The BIG YES Accelerates Leadership - Leadership Freak](#) 07/12/2