

My Call

In the great movie City Slickers...

Billy Crystal plays Mitch, a broken man who is trying to put the pieces back together and find himself, as well as his purpose in life.

On a ranch out west, he meets an old Cowboy, Curly, played by Jack Palance, who holds up one finger and tells him the secret to life and happiness is just one thing.

When Mitch asks what that one thing is, Curly replies, "That's what you gotta figure out".

17 As Jesus continued down the road, a man ran up, knelt before him,

At this point in Mark, we are only told that someone runs up to Jesus and kneels before him.

We do not know anything else about him.

We might wonder what is wrong with this man?

What does he need from Jesus? Is he sick? Blind?

Deaf? Possessed by a demon? Does he have a son or daughter who is sick?

What does he need so urgently?

But the man in question isn't sick.

Nor is his family.

This is the question he asked —

"Good Teacher, what must I do to obtain eternal life?" —

and it is not a test for Jesus.

He truly wants to know Jesus' answer, and we should probably be just as interested.

The only "problem" that he has is a deep, abiding concern about the meaning of life.

He is desperate, and he kneels before Jesus to ask him.

But Jesus surprises the man (and the readers)

by responding with, **"Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."**

Then Jesus immediately launches into a recitation of the commandments.

19 You know the commandments: Don't commit murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't give false testimony. Don't cheat. Honor your father and mother."

These commands are all from the commands related to human interactions and not human-God interaction.

The man now replies by simply calling Jesus

"Teacher," he responded, "I've kept all of these things since I was a boy."

This man has lived a good life.
He is a religious man who has kept
all of the commandments since his youth.
And he has been blessed with many possessions.
But he's not content.
Because he knows that all the possessions
in the world won't keep him from death.
So he interrupts Jesus on his journey,
seeking an answer to this question that is gnawing at him.
What must he do to inherit eternal life

21 Jesus looked at him carefully and loved him.

It is interesting that Mark, who usually gets right to the point,
is the only Gospel writer to include this detail.
This helps us understand that this is, in fact, a story about healing.
Healed, in his case, of his tight grip on his many possessions.
Jesus seems to see right through to this man's soul
and makes just one request of this man
. He looks at him with love and says to him:

" You are lacking one thing. Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me."

He has the opportunity of a lifetime –
the chance to become a follower of Jesus;
and to be assured of eternal life.
It's exactly what he wants.
He wants what Jesus offers.
He asks Jesus how to get it.
And Jesus tells him exactly how.

22 But the man was dismayed at this statement and went away saddened, because he had many possessions.

The one thing that he needed to follow Jesus,
and to be assured of inheriting eternal life,
was the one thing that he could not bring himself to do:
sell his many possessions.
His possessions themselves, though,
were not really the problem.
It was this man's tight grip on those possessions.

It reminds me of how you catch a monkey.
Not something I have personally ever wanted to do,
but first you start with a jar that a monkey can
easily put its hand into when its fingers are open.
Then you put something into the jar that the monkey wants – like some fruit.
The monkey will reach his hand into the jar to get the fruit.
He will close his fist around it.
But of course, when he closes his fist,
especially if it's got something inside it,
he can't get it out of the jar.
The monkey doesn't want to let the fruit go,
but unless he does, he won't be able to get his hand out.
And he is stubborn enough about it that he will
risk capture rather than let go of that fruit.
That is how you catch a monkey.

The rich man in today's gospel reading is much like the monkey –

He doesn't want to open his hand and let go of the fruit,
let go of his many possessions.
Think about what a gift this man is given.
Jesus tells him precisely what to do with his life.
How many times have we wanted that same thing?
To be told by Jesus exactly what he wants us to do?
We look for signs, we pray for direction,
we wonder what we're supposed to do for God.
So many times, we would love for Jesus simply
to come and tell us exactly what he wants us to do.
To show us our call.

But there's a problem: It's not what he wants to hear.
He is told to sell all his possessions and give
the money to the poor and follow Jesus.
Now he knows exactly what to do –
to become a follower of Jesus, and to inherit eternal life.
But he doesn't want to do it.
Sell all his possessions?
He has so much! How can he do that?
How can he let go of all that he has?
He is shocked. And he turns and walks away, grieving.
And misses the opportunity of a lifetime.
With love, Jesus says You lack one thing.

If we are honest, we all lack one thing.
What that one thing is is different for everyone.
Beyond the fact that the rich man has too much,
there's another, more important part of the rich man's problem.

"What must I do?" he asks.

He cannot recognize that abundance may be found
outside the wealth and riches he has stored up.
Now, he is not sure what to do with his life.
Many of us have been there. Now, what, Lord?

There is an old hymn that goes Jesus calls us
o'er the tumult of our life's wild, restless sea;
Day by day his sweet voice sounding,
Saying, 'Christian, follow me
Notice that Jesus loves the rich man first
before requesting him to do anything.
Loving and being loved allows us to see and then
focus on the mission and call that Jesus has for us.
Statistics indicate that fewer people are responding
to a call to set apart ministry, whether that involves
being a pastor, missionary, or serving in some other capacity,
than in any other generation.

This is one reason why one of our TWK
priorities is Creating a Culture of Call...and

A practice of witnessing God's love through your personal story, encouraging others to follow Christ.

The culture of call involves doing the hard work of love here first.
Then Jesus called the rich man to look inward
to find his next move outward.

What is his next most faithful step?

The point of giving all we have is so that others might
find what we can all share in the love of Christ.

So once we know our one thing, what are we prepared to do to give it up?

23 Looking around, Jesus said to his disciples, " It will be very hard for the wealthy to enter God's kingdom!" 24 His words startled the disciples, so Jesus told them again, " Children, it's difficult to enter God's kingdom!

His words startled the disciples!!!
They thought they were in because they answered the call,

and all they had done to follow. Jesus continues...

25 It's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom." 26 They were shocked even more and said to each other, "Then who can be saved?"

They honestly thought that the rich man
had it made in the shade. Now who knows?
And we might wonder whether we are
supposed to do the same,
sell all our possessions in order to become a follower of Jesus.
The answer, I think, is no.
Not for most of us.
Probably not for any of us.
Very few people are called to do that.

We know, for example, that Peter still
had his house after he began following Jesus,
and still had his fishing boat.
He didn't sell them and give the money to the poor.
Not even all the disciples were asked to sell everything they had.
And so, certainly, we are not all called to do that.

But think about the monkey again and the jar.
I suspect that we all have something that
could be put in that jar, or that is already in that jar,
that we might struggle to let go of.
We all have something that is keeping us
from giving ourselves entirely to God;
from completely trusting Jesus.
And we might think that there is no way
we can give up that one thing to live into our call.

And for those of us who feel we could
never overcome the obstacles that keep us
from seeing and uncovering our gifts and our call,
we need to hear Jesus' next words to the disciples,
who could not fathom giving more than they had.

27 Jesus looked at them carefully and said, " It's impossible with human beings, but not with God. All things are possible for God."

This is the possibility of what we might do with God's help.
That can take a college student with no church background

to go into ordained ministry, where Jesus was calling me.
To follow and go places I never could have dreamed
and serve people I never could have imagined.
God can love us and lead us wherever we are called
to go or whatever we are called to do in our lives.

Jesus looked at the rich man with love and said to him,
"You lack one thing."

If he were to look at you today, with love,
and say the same thing, what would that one thing be?
You lack one thing. What is that one thing?
That thing you are holding onto too tightly
to give yourself fully to Jesus and his call on your life?
What is in your jar?
What are you tempted to keep your grip on,
to cling to, that you might need to let go of,
to lean into your call and your next most faithful step to follow Jesus?

And it may not have anything to do with your possessions.
It may be something else entirely for you.
Something that is keeping you from
being all that Jesus wants you to be or calling you to do.
But here's the thing about it.
It's not something you have to do.
It's not something you have to add to your busy life.
You just have to let it go. Loosen your hold on it a little.
If it has become a burden, let it go.
Trust Jesus. That is all he is asking.

Jesus is calling us to bring others to him
and also to live out our own calling.
May we ourselves and as a church, see our gifts
and give those back to a world in need.
God loves us first before asking.
Then Jesus says Come and follow me.