

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
An Abundance Attitude: The Trouble with Treasure
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Isaiah 58: 6-11; Mark 10:17-27

They had it all. They were millionaires with all the trimmings. They could go where they desired. They could have anything they wanted. But something was missing. Their marriage was a mess. Their lives were not their own. They sensed that deep inside something was not right. So they gave it all up. They sold their home, gave away all of their money and committed themselves to doing whatever it was that Jesus desired of them. They took literally Jesus' command to sell all and follow him. Their journey took them to Africa as missionaries, to a communal Christian community called Koinonia Farms, and then ultimately to found Habitat for Humanity. Millard and Linda Fuller had it all, but they gave it up in order to share their lives with the world...and now Habitat is the largest non-profit home builder in the world having constructed more than 800,000 homes housing more than four million people. It is an amazing story. So how many of you are ready to join me in doing this? Giving away all we have and doing something amazing for God? Yeah, me neither. I am afraid I love my possessions a bit too much to give them up. And that being the case, what are we to do with this story from Mark...and the Fuller's story?

What I hope that we will do with it is to see it as Jesus' attempt to help this young man, and by extension all of us, reach his full potential as a God follower by helping him begin his journey into the very heart of God's love. To understand this, we need to return to the story. Jesus is hanging with his homies, when a young man rushes up, kneels and asks, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life." For most of us, we would assume he is asking how to get into heaven. But this is not the case. For Jews in the first century, eternal life was something that one would receive here on earth when God's eternal kingdom arrived here (on earth) and not there (in heaven). And since Jesus had been preaching and teaching about this coming Kingdom, the young man figured Jesus was the go-to guy. Second, we might assume that the young man is trying to earn his way into the kingdom. Again, this is not the case. He understands that as a Jew his inheritance is the kingdom, if he is righteous...if he stays true to Torah. Surprisingly Jesus does not disabuse him of this notion. Instead Jesus asks the young man if he had stayed true to the way of God by following the commandments. When the young man replies truthfully that he had indeed done so, Jesus loves him. What this means for me is that Jesus saw in this young man extraordinary potential; extraordinary potential to be a God follower. The same potential Jesus had seen in Peter, Andrew, James and John. Such potential that Jesus invites him to join the other disciples on their amazing adventure for God. The only thing the young man must do is to sell all he has, give the money to the poor and come along.

Why does he have to do this? I would argue that he needs to do so in order that he take his foot off the brake and begin his journey toward fulfilling his potential as a follower of God. I realize it might sound strange that this young man needed to begin his journey, considering that he was already keeping many of the commandments. But the commandments the man was keeping, aside from honoring his parents, were the "Thou shall nots"; thou shall not lie, cheat, steal, defraud and so on. But those

commandments are not the journey. They are the guard rails that protect us while we are on the journey. They keep us from wandering off the road and into a ditch, or from running into and hurting others along the way. The journey on the other hand is the “Thou shalt”; thou shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and thou shall love your neighbor as yourself. In other words, the journey is what happens when we live Isaiah 58 by sharing our bread with the hungry, covering the naked, and housing the homeless, we are fueled for reaching our potential as followers of God. The journey is what happens when we share what we have. This lack of forward motion on this young man’s journey, raises the question of why hasn’t he gotten started? Why hasn’t he shared his bread with the poor and shown concern for his neighbors. Why has he kept all his wealth for himself? I believe the answer is because he has his foot on the brake and not on the accelerator, meaning he was living with an attitude of scarcity.

Like so many people in this world, this young man had found that treasure, rather than giving him an attitude of abundance, had given him an attitude of scarcity. What is an attitude of scarcity? It is, the more treasure I have, the more I realize what I have to lose. The more treasure I have, the more treasure I believe that I need to stay afloat. The more treasure I have, the less, if any, can I share, because then I will not have enough. This is seeing the world with an attitude of scarcity. It is fearing that I will lose what I have, so I hold on to it more and more tightly with each passing day. My favorite story of this is of a friend in San Antonio, who was a wealth manager. One of his clients, in their early nineties, single, no family had assets in the millions. One day they were discussing what to do with the money, and my friend, who is very generous, asked, “Have you ever thought about giving some away?” The response was immediate and angry. “How dare you ask me to give any away. I may need it all.” This is an attitude of scarcity. This is the attitude that the young man brought to Jesus.

What Jesus was hoping to engender in the young man, in order that the young man reach his full potential, was to shift his attitude about treasure from being one of scarcity to being one of abundance. What does abundance look like? It looks like: I have enough, and enough to share. I have enough, and don’t need so much more that I cannot love God and neighbor. I have enough and do not fear giving some away because I believe that just as God has provided in the past, God will provide in the future. It looks like Isaiah 58:11. *“The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.”* This is the attitude that allows people to take their foot off the brake and put the pedal to the metal and fully engage the journey; to fully live into our potential of being followers of God.

God wants us all to reach our full potential as men and women who follow Jesus along the journey to the heart of God. For some of us, in order to reach our potential, we need to sell all and give it to the poor. For others of us, who are already on the journey and are living with an attitude of abundance, it is simply to keep our foot on the accelerator. As I look out at you all this morning, I don’t see anyone whose foot is on the break. I see generous people, willing to live into Isaiah 58. The challenge then for us is not to sell all that we have, but it is to continue along the way, along the journey of faithfulness. My challenge to you then is to simply ask yourselves this question, “How fast am I going and could I go bit faster by sharing a bit more of what I have with those in need?”