

Eternal God, open our hearts and minds, that we might hear your word and live your desire for us this day. Amen

A rich man, a man of abundant living, comes to Jesus (Did you notice all the stuff his workers were hauling for him in the video clip? Kind of reminded me of my recent move! More than any person or persons really needs.) but this wealthy man comes to Jesus, household in tow, falls on his knees and asks “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

I wonder what he was expecting Jesus to say. Part of me thinks maybe he was looking for affirmation for his faithfulness in following the commandments and accolades for all that he had accomplished in his life.

After all, in the first century, as is sometimes the case even today, people of great wealth are considered blessed, their successes a reward from God.

Another part of me suspects that, despite his wealth, the man is experiencing a hollowness in his chest, an emptiness of spirit that makes him wonder if he has missed something important and just wants to check it out with Jesus.

Whatever his reasons, the rich man, gets more than he bargains for and is absolutely gobsmacked when Jesus tells him to sell everything he has, give the money to the poor and follow him.

This is NOT, apparently, what the rich man either wants or expects to hear! Isn't his wealth a blessing from God? Why would he then be expected to sell everything? Where would that put his standing in society?

According to Jesus' recommendation, the kingdom of God truly does set this world on its head. All that is valued and appreciated and respected in this world, means nothing in the kingdom of God.

If the rich aren't blessed and if attending to the commandments isn't enough, what the heck?! Why bother? Nobody wants to live an impoverished life; and what does that mean for eternal life?! More poverty?! For eternity?! No thanks! What ever happened to "streets lined with gold"?

As for following Jesus, having to hang out with all those sinners: tax collectors, prostitutes, the blind, the lame, the downtrodden, those expelled from society ... all these people tagging along behind Jesus, pulling on his robe, begging for him to notice them, to heal them ... you want me to join them?

These are the people that will make up God's kingdom?! Really?! Who needs it?! Who wants to spend eternity with them as your neighbour?! I'll pass thanks. I'll just take my abundant possessions and live the life of luxury here and now and skip that whole eternity thing!

I guess the rich man missed the look in Jesus' eyes. I guess he missed what the writer of the gospel does not, when he notes "Jesus, looking at him, loved him..."

Jesus loves him, despite his wealth, not because of it. Jesus loves him, as he loves the innocent children that we are told gather around him, just a few verses previous to today's story.

Jesus loves him, even though he knows how challenging this ask is going to be. Jesus loves him, even though the man cannot follow through on the request.

He cannot let go of his material wealth. He cannot give up his life of luxury to follow Jesus. But still, Jesus loves him.

Isn't that it? Isn't that what this story is about? Not specifically wealth, or status, but our inability to achieve perfection no matter how hard we might try. Still, Jesus loves us.

We are caught between living in this imperfect world and striving for the perfection of the next. It is, it seems, an impossible task. We hit the mark in some areas and totally miss it in others. Still Jesus loves us.

"Then who can be saved?" the disciples ask. Jesus looking at them (probably with love) states "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

To "inherit eternal life" to enter the kingdom of God, is not about how perfectly we have followed the commandments, or even how closely we have followed Jesus, persecutions and all. It's not about anything we do or don't do, say or don't say.

This doesn't mean, of course, that we shouldn't strive for all of these things, for seeking God and walking with Christ and living holy lives. But it does mean that, left to our own devices, it's impossible for us to do anything that will ensure access to the kingdom of God; as impossible as it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

Simply put, we inherit eternal life, we are welcomed into the kingdom of God for one reason, and one reason only. Jesus loves us...God loves us, as only God can. Thanks be to God!