

13.10.2024 St Brandon's

Mark 10: 17- 31

It is always a joy to hold a baptism in our morning service. The words of the promises and prayers reminds us all of what it means to follow Jesus and to choose his way as our path in life, guided and supported by godparents, parents, wider family and church family. Little Anwen is surrounded by this love and care, which is wonderful. She will need you all, not just in her early years but throughout her growing up. Hard to imagine now, but she will one day be heading off to school, and choosing who to make friends with, to high school and the challenges of the teenage years. She'll need you as she thinks about her work, her relationships, her hopes and her future life — she'll need you to remind her that God is with her and loves her, that God has good plans for her. You are God's arms to hug her, God's ears to listen to her, God's feet to rescue her, God's voice to reassure her. What a privilege, to be undertaken, as the service said, "with the help of God".

Given all this, it may seem unfortunate that today's reading tells us about someone who meets Jesus and has the chance to follow him but chooses, albeit with a heavy heart, not to do so. This story occurs in three of the four gospels, and in the others the man is also described as being young and powerful. By most people's reckoning, he's got everything going for him... or has he? He's proud of his respectability and status in the religious community, but he also knows there is something missing. So, he runs up to Jesus— just as he is leaving. Maybe he'd been plucking up courage and sees this is his last chance... and he asks that telling question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Three words in this short sentence are very telling. Firstly, *I do*. In common with most people, then and ever since, this man thinks he has to earn eternal life by what he does, to keep the rules, pay his dues, live a good life. And secondly, he thinks that the faith he's been born into means he will *inherit* eternal life, as a right. But it doesn't work like that, because eternal life is given as a gift, through faith in Jesus our Saviour — who has done everything necessary to "open the gate of heaven" to those who believe and trust in God.

Back to the story. As the man stands before Jesus we read, Jesus, looking at him, loved him. In his compassion and wisdom, Jesus sees exactly where this young man is. He sees beyond the wealth and trappings of his life, beyond the religious knowledge and obedience. He sees his heart, and the fear and hardness which have crept in and trapped him. Jesus knows that his wealth and possessions, the power and status they give him, have made him less able to see the needs of others, to be generous, to love.

The supposed security and comfort of material possessions turn out to be barriers to moving forward, embracing change and taking the opportunity before him to stay with Jesus, to live and learn and grow in love through that relationship with him. Jesus offers the man freedom to become the person God created him to be, freedom to follow and to find eternal life. But it's costly — it always is. We all know, if we're honest, how hard it can be to take the less-travelled road, to live according to God's priorities and values.

So, before we condemn the man in the story, let's instead recognise the forks in the roads of our own lives when we might have made better choices, or have missed opportunities to grow, to learn, to love.... Let's remember too that God forgives all who repent and gives us his help and strength for the choices and decisions which lie ahead in our lives. It is NEVER too late to begin following Jesus for the first time, or to begin again, and again... If those baptism promises struck you, perhaps you are hearing God offering you that chance, today.

In a moment, I will lead us all in a prayer based on this story, but first, let's hear it again from the man's perspective:

"Follow me" he said, for I had asked him the next step on a journey of personal salvation. He reminded me of all the good things I already knew and did. So, nothing was left to do — I was ready to go.

"Now sell all you have," he said. "Give it all away to the poor."

How could I let go just like that — lighten the load, shed my responsibilities, become someone I did not know? What would be left?

"Follow me", he said.

But with heavy heart, I shook my head.,

PAUSE. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus,

We know just how hard it is to give up other things and follow you. Forgive us for times when we have clung to material things, times when we have ignored or forgotten others, when we've had the means to help, the chance to make a difference, and chosen not to.

But Lord Jesus, we know that when you look at us, you love us. You see us with your compassion and you guide us with your wisdom.

Give us grace, we pray, to choose to follow you, to believe and trust, for you are the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Amen.

We are so thankful that, like baby Anwen, God gives us all friends and families to support and encourage us through our lives' journeys.

So let's sing our next hymn, 73 — "Brother, sister let me serve you".