

LACKING ONE THING
Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time • October 10, 2021
Job 23: 1-9, 16-17; Mark 10: 17-31
by Pat Berger

It is likely, I think, that our reading for today from the Gospel according to Mark does not rank high on our list of favorite Bible stories -- and probably the same could be said about our verses from Job, but we will come to that in a bit. Mark tells us about a young man who came and knelt before Jesus, and asked him what he would need to do to inherit eternal life. In Mark it always behooves us to pay attention to details, and one is at the first of this reading: the man fell on his knees. Every other place in Mark where someone falls on his knees, it is because he needs healing; and every other place where Jesus tells someone to "go," that also is in relation to a healing.

So maybe what we need to think about with this man is that his wealth, his possessions may have so much control over him that they are making him ill -- maybe not physically ill; maybe they are making his heart ache, or his soul. Some of us may not think of ourselves as wealthy; I have always thought this story did not relate to me, for goodness sake. And yet. When we think of most of everyone else in the world, all of us certainly are wealthy. Still, it may not be our money that controls us. Perhaps it is our belongings, or our knowledge, or the way we do something or other better than anyone else -- what is it in your life that gets in the way of your being one with God?

Job was certainly at a place where he did not feel "one with God." Last week, we heard that God had told the Satan that he could have his way with Job, only he ought to spare Job's life. Between that reading and the one Mark read for us today, Job has lost all of his animals and all of his servants to various marauding tribes. And all of his sons and his daughters have died. Job had continued to worship God through all of this, but by today's verses, it seems that he was at least wondering what was going on. Where was God in all of this? Job was still confident that God existed -- somewhere, somehow -- and that if God would only hear Job's case, he would be vindicated. And on the other hand, Job was "terrified" that somehow God had gone absent, and what in the world was going to happen now? Some of us may have had times when we wondered that very same thing. We have two more weeks of reading from Job; we will find out what happens next.

After Jesus reminded the rich young man of the commandments and the man assured Jesus that he had always kept those commandments (notice, too, that Jesus did not question him about this; he simply loved him), then Jesus said to him, "You lack one thing, . . ." and then told him to go and sell what he owned and give the money to the poor. He didn't tell the man what he lacked and we will

get back to that; it seemed to be hard enough news for the man that he ought to give what he owned to the poor. Imagine hearing this in the midst of our stewardship drive . . . Jesus didn't tell the man to sell everything and give the proceeds to the church, and we don't ask that either. It seems that you, the people of the Plymouth Church, use what you have in ways that God's Kingdom might grow, AND we hope that each one will continue, carefully and prayerfully, to consider the amount that might be given to Plymouth and its ministries for the next program year. Your Budget Committee has been at work devising your budget for the new year. Shortly, committees will plan what they can do within that budget -- and they are always willing to plan one more time when it turns out that more funds are promised than we had thought might be.

I took a very interesting tour of the Mission section of Plymouth's website the other night. Hurray for you all! You give generously to the mission program of the Presbyterian Church, and that is important. You give generously to local mission efforts, and that is important. And there are the expenses right here at this church, and you have supported those, too, which is also important. Your gifts to this church are what make all of this possible. They are what make Plymouth Presbyterian Church a force in this community. Your gifts show that this is important to you, and all in this body are grateful. And you give to this church not only your financial gifts; you also give generously of your energies. There are not fewer jobs to do in a smaller church, just fewer people to do them. From what I have seen in my short time here, you all are as generous with your time and energy as you are with your dollars. It isn't often that one needs to ask more than one or two people before a job is taken care of.

Jesus said to the young man, you lack one thing. Jesus did not clarify what that one thing was. It would be easy to presume that the lack was something material, since the focus here was on the man's wealth. Or we could think that it might have something to do with the man asking, what must I do, rather than, who must I be? He may not be able to see that eternal life might not be something he can do by himself, no matter his wealth or talents. What is the one thing that I lack, or that each one of us lacks? Karoline Lewis, in her commentary, asks, "What is the one thing that is at the core of who you are, what keeps you from being the follower, the disciple, the believer, the witness God wants and needs you to be?" What is God asking of you, what is being asked of Plymouth during this next year and beyond? The answer might be hard to hear, or even harder than that. And then we will remember what Jesus said: with humans, it is impossible, but with God, all things -- all things, then and now and forever, for everyone -- all things are possible. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray.