



Wednesday Prayer

21st Sunday after Pentecost – An invisible backpack of privilege

“Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” ~Mark 10:21-22

Every time I hear this story of the rich man asking what he needs to do to inherit eternal life, it makes me uncomfortable because it reminds me of my own privilege. I do pretty well, overall. By the world’s standards I’m wealthier than most. I eat three meals a day, drive a nice car, and own a house. When I got prostate cancer in 2021, I had great healthcare and insurance to have it removed and made a full recovery. I’m a straight, white, male who carries an “invisible backpack of privilege,” thanks to the patriarchy we all are born into. When a church member asked me what I meant by that, having taken offense at the idea, I told him the story about when I graduated from seminary in 1989. I was offered a call to a large church all *before* graduation, unlike many of my classmates who were women (most more qualified than me!) who waited for months to receive a call to their first church. That was privilege.

People with power don’t like to be told that they HAVE it. It makes us uncomfortable. The rich man doesn’t even see it and yet, he’s not malicious. Heck, he even kneels before Jesus with sincerity. But here’s the deal: it’s hard to follow Jesus when your hands are full of idols that we so heavily lean upon: prestige, titles, wealth, security, and the luxury of not having to fight a fight that doesn’t affect us directly.

The thing is, sexism affects us all. And we can’t dismantle it and help kids who are crushed underneath it without doing our part and relinquishing some control over the power and privilege we carry, as men. Thankfully, times have changed since the 1980’s. Women now have more opportunities for leadership in church and society. Yet we have work to do as we learn how to let go and follow Jesus. When I think about the kids who are groomed and targeted for sex trafficking it reminds me of the vital role men, especially, play in all this. By and large, WE are the ones supplying the demand for what traffickers are peddling. We can’t simply leave women and survivors at the forefront of this fight. We, too, must find our voice, let go of our security, and speak up on behalf of children.

But before we do that, we must figure it out for ourselves. Do the soul work of discerning what you believe when it comes to sex. Our boys deserve more than our silence on this. When was the last time you thought about your values around sex and how to express it in healthy ways? What’s right and what’s wrong? What’s okay and what’s off limits? Start there. Come to terms with what *you* really believe. Let your faith guide you by the power of the Holy Spirit. Then *tell it* to your kids or grandkids. Show them how much you cherish them. That’s worth more than you can imagine (even as uncomfortable as it may be) because they want to know. They’re making it up too, as they go and need our support.

Oh, and one more thing. You’re going to need this: notice how verse 21 says Jesus was “looking at him with love.” Never forget that simple truth, often overlooked. There’s hope for us, all of us. I take comfort that Jesus LOVES my privileged and imperfect self. That alone makes all things possible. Amen.