

St. Paul's Episcopal Church

Homily 9:00 + 5:00

October 11, 2009

Mark 10:17-31

“Security Blankets”

Kate Gillooly

*O God, make us aware of your love for us,
that we might step out in faith and find you waiting to embrace us. Amen.*

Recently I was on a long airplane flight with my kids. We watched a movie together called “*Imagine That.*” Did anyone see it? It stars Eddie Murphy as a successful financial executive and shares the story of how he gets involved in his daughter’s imaginary world. At the beginning, the only reason he is following her very specific instructions for dealing with dragons and how to talk to princesses is because she seems to have access to accurate stock analysis through her security blanket called Goo Gah. So, yes, there is a scene where Eddie Murphy is standing outside a suburban sleepover party crying I want the Goo Gah! Gimme the Goo Gah! And of course, the movie is really about Eddie Murphy remembering that what’s really important is relationships, not stocks or even security blankets.

I don’t remember having a particular security object as a young kid. Do you?... Do you remember what you called it?... I’ve heard some strange ones in my time. I once knew a boy who carried a red crayon around in a jar. Perfectly fine idea until we went to the beach and it got soft in the hot sun and started to melt. I have taken care of children who can’t go to sleep without their teddy bear, blankie, stuffed lamb, or favorite doll. One girl I know goes to sleep to the same lullaby music every night. Some of us adults use other items for security – don’t we? It might be an outfit that makes us feel powerful or young. It might be a song we play to relax or to feel capable. Maybe its alcohol or comfort food or working out or going over our bank statements. Well, maybe not bank statements these days! I think there is nothing wrong with security objects, as long as we remember what they can and cannot accomplish for us. They may provide comfort, a sense of security; maybe boost our confidence a little. But they cannot all on their own change things or fix things. They are merely objects, their meaning comes from what meaning we place upon them.

I think a sense of security is an issue in our Gospel lesson today. The man who approached Jesus seemed to be looking for something more than he already possessed. He followed the religious law of the time, and yet – he wondered if there was something more he could do to inherit eternal life. I think his question was a sincere one. I think he craved deeper relationship with God, a sense of meaning and significance that his wealth couldn’t provide him.

This story is one of the tough ones in the gospels. It's tough for several reasons. We don't like to talk about money, especially in church. We already feel guilty if we have money, and we don't like the way Jesus tells the man to sell everything he has. We take this as a judgment upon our wealth. We think Jesus is telling us that if we don't part with everything we have, then we will not get into heaven. But I don't believe that's what this story is about. Not exactly.

I do think it is about the perils of wealth, but not as hellfire and brimstone judgment so much as loving prescription for happiness. If we go back to the words of the Gospel, we see that Jesus looked at the man with love. Then he said, "You lack one thing." Jesus says this not out of judgment of inadequacy, but to show the man a way out of a difficult situation. Some say this is a story of healing – that it has the same structure, wording and placement as other healing stories of Jesus. If we look at it as a healing story rather than a story of judgment, we can take away a very different message. I believe Jesus feels compassion for the man, as he feels for each of us. He doesn't feel compassion for the man because God is going to judge him harshly and send him to hell for being rich. Rather, this man yearns for a deeper faith, and Jesus knows that his riches are part of what stands in the way.

Anything can get in the way of relationships. Especially things in excess. Too much food, money, work, drugs, travel, power, responsibility – anything that clutters up one's life can interfere with relationships – with family, friends, God and self. We all know that feeling of life being too cluttered. That's why we go on vacation and retreats, why we go to our cabin in the woods, or go camping, why some of us come to church – to have a moment of silence, time for some meditation, a chance to clear our heads. It's why some of us find spring cleaning so cathartic – a chance to shed some of the stuff that weighs us down and distracts us.

And Jesus knows that this man is in need of some of that spring cleaning. Maybe, like Eddie Murphy, he needs to get in touch with what's really important. Maybe he needs to be in relationship with the poor. Perhaps he needs to be reminded of who he is without the wealth. Maybe he needs to experience total reliance upon God alone.

And that is what is so astounding to the disciples. When Jesus talks about it being hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, this makes no sense to them. For it was believed (and I'm afraid it still is) that wealth was a sign of God's favor. If you were rich, then God had smiled upon you. If you were poor, then you had done something wrong in the eyes of God. Jesus taught a very different message. He suggested that God could be found among the poor, that the meek would inherit the earth, that being rich was no guarantee of being "in" with God, in fact it could be a deterrent!

Jesus taught that if you **really** wanted to follow him, you had to give everything else up. Stop relying on your job, your family, your riches. Focus exclusively on him. Trust completely. Make no back-up plans. Turn yourself over to his care and his way.

And this, this demand for complete submission. This is scariest of all. Never mind the money, which I suppose I could earn again. But power? I worked really hard to get this far! Control? I don't want anyone else, even God, to be in control of me! That is most scary of all. Where is that security blanket when I need it? Oh, NOW I'm supposed to give it up? No way. No

thank you. I'll just go on my way and keep my sense of control, thank you very much. And Jesus sighs.

The secret is – we aren't in control. That sense of control just comes from our security items. And what Jesus wants is for us to realize that **God** is in control, loves us, and wants the best for us. If we can just step out in faith a little, just loosen our clutching grasp of our security items, whatever they may be, then we can take hold of God's outstretched hand, waiting to embrace us and bring us in to the kingdom of God. For God brings us in. We can't buy or earn our way in. But for God it is possible. All we are asked to do is let go and trust. Can you do it? Just one step at a time? Let go just a little? Let's try.

Amen.