

transforming generosity

Selling Everything for Freedom

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In today's gospel, Mark tells us about a rich man who anxiously runs up to Jesus and begs to know what he needs to do to inherit eternal life. He says he's followed the commandments since his youth, but still, he's worried. Jesus then offers a simple, but apparently very difficult, answer: Sell everything, give to the poor, and follow me.

Like many of us who withdraw on hearing an answer we don't like, the man walks away shocked, long-faced and sad. Giving up his wealth, it seems, is just too much.

It's a story that comforts my ego when I need certainty or a useful clarification of who's in and who's out. Yes, I might sympathize with the poor rich guy who's been faithful but has less of a chance of getting through than the camel — but I'm not rich, so my path will be easier.

That smugness is deceiving because I know, as with every biblical story, that we are called to find ourselves in the characters portrayed. So how am I like the rich man?

While I can't identify with his wealth, or at times his faithful adherence to the commandments, something in his anxiety hits home. Despite all he has, something is gnawing at him, something is missing, and he worries that that will keep him from eternal life.

That sounds a lot like me and the world around me: We may have all the comforts of life, yet something is always missing and we get stuck, which only adds to our anxiety. "If only I were richer, smarter, 10 pounds lighter, more athletic, more certain ... *then I would ...*"

So how can we, in the 21st century, find peace in "Sell everything"? Could it be that what Jesus is telling us is more like: "Abandon all of your unhealthy attachments. Let go of the things, habits, thoughts, doubts, addictions, false securities, and fears that hold you back. Have faith. Stretch yourself. Seize the moment and take risks"?

As we assess what to make of our time, talents and treasure this season, we are called to make sense of the words of One who says both "Sell everything" and "I have come that you might live abundantly." It sounds confusing, but in the end we must trust Jesus when he says: "There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time." (Mark 10:29)

The kingdom of God, eternal life, true freedom are near. How can we not seize the moment?

Nick Cuccia, a former Los Angeles Times editor and page designer, now employs his skills to develop materials for The Episcopal Network for Stewardship, churches and other nonprofits.

For reflection ...

- ❖ When was the last time you tried a new hobby or activity even though you knew you might not succeed or be good at it?
- ❖ What fear or worry is holding you back from living abundantly and generously right now?