

Growing up, I had a rock collection. Now, there was nothing really scientific or formal about it. The only criteria were whether I thought a rock was cool or unique. So we would take summer trips and if I happened to come across a rock I liked, you better believe it was coming home with me. In fact, there were times when my parents would have to place limits on the rocks I brought home. My dad would say that too many rocks would make our bags too heavy and the plane wouldn't be able to fly. I was never sure if he was serious about that or not, but I definitely didn't want to risk it.

How painful it was for me to leave a favorite rock behind. For my 7-year-old self, it was like having to choose which of your children you were going to leave behind. It just didn't seem fair to have to leave one out. Where would this rock end up? Who else could possibly provide it such a quality home? Never mind the fact that the rocks I collected sat on a shelf in my bedroom, mostly forgotten. Because the truth is, I didn't collect rocks because they had any real meaning to me. I collected rocks so I could have them. I collected rocks because something inside me said it's nice to have stuff, even if it's rocks.

Even at a young age, I had completely bought into one of the prevailing messages of our culture: having stuff is better than not having stuff. And having more stuff is always better. It doesn't have to be rocks, although if I were born a few decades earlier during the pet rock craze, I could have made a fortune selling the rocks I had collected. We like having things. More home décor, more clothes, more shoes for just the right occasion, more trophies, more memorabilia, more money. And living in a culture of more makes it really challenging to hear what's happening in our Gospel text today.

Now, there's a few things I think are worth pointing out about our text in Mark today. The man isn't described as rich or a ruler or anything like that. In fact, Jesus seems to buy his sincerity so we also are not to assume that the man has done anything wrong in the accumulation of his wealth. He's lived a good life. And yet it's not enough. He wants to know what more he can do to inherit eternal life. And the answer is that whatever he's done so far, whatever he's accomplished, whatever he has is not enough. It will never be enough. Because money and possessions and status aren't the currency of the Kingdom of God.

The other thing that I think it worth noting is that Jesus looks upon the man with love. Not condemnation or with a belittling eye. Not even with judgement. Jesus looks upon the man and loves him. In fact, this is

the only time in all of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), that Jesus is ever described as looking upon someone with love. Now, that doesn't mean Jesus doesn't love others, but it's significant when it's the only time it's mentioned. Jesus looks upon the man with love, even when it means telling the man things he doesn't want to hear. Go, sell, give, come, and follow.

The thing is, we often try to soften Jesus' words here. "Jesus didn't really mean that." "Jesus was just talking to a specific group of people and it couldn't possibly be about me." "Jesus was exaggerating to make a point." But no matter how we try to spin it, the man clearly understands Jesus and it's not exaggeration. It's real. It's as real as the shock and grief and sadness the man feels having heard Jesus' call. And I like to think that the man understood Jesus clearly. And he knows the truth of when Jesus says, "How hard is it to enter the Kingdom of God!" Because following Jesus isn't easy. Discipleship isn't a spectator sport. And the truth is, there are aspects of our lives that are not fit for the Kingdom of God, things that we are called to leave behind for the sake of the Gospel promise.

Each of you has received a rock as you made your way into worship today. No, they're not rocks from my collection. As far as I know, those rocks are somewhere out in the yard of my parents' house. But I invite you to take a moment and think about what your rock might be – the things that you hold onto, the parts of your life that you just couldn't bear to be without. Could you let it go? In all seriousness, could you really let it go for the life that Jesus has promised? In all honesty, there are more days than not that I don't I could let it go. I don't know if I could do it because it feels impossible.

My friends in Christ, Jesus is not issuing a call to absolute poverty. That's not a mark of the Kingdom of God. But what Jesus is calling us to is a renewed trust in the hope and promise of God, that when we are willing to let go, we will find even more abundance. We'll find new community, new abundance, new care. We'll find new life. We'll discover the life giving truth of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. That it's truly enough. That it's all we've ever needed. And if we aren't willing? If we feel so stuck that we just can't? If it really does feel impossible? Well, for God all things are possible. Keep the faith, my friends. Continue on the journey that Christ has called us to. And may the grace of God in Christ Jesus shape us, strengthen us, and lead us, that we might begin to leave a few rocks behind. Amen.