

*The message is prepared by Rev. Pamela Graf Short for the People of Prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church for the twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, October 14, in the year of our LORD two thousand and eighteen. It is based on the following story:*

**Mark 10:17-31**

**17** As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

**18** Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.

**19** You know the commandments: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother." "

**20** He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth."

**21** 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."

**22** When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

**23** Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

**24** And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!

**25** It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

**26** They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?"

**27** Jesus looked at them and said,

"For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

**28** Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you."

**29** Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news,

**30** who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.

**31** But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

**D**o you find our Bible story for today perplexing and disappointing, or fascinating and encouraging?

Do you identify most with the fellow who is seeking something more, or with those who have given up much?

Does the story take you to your knees or make you want to run off?

Do you think it is a story about Stewardship or about God's call? Is there really a difference between the two?

Well, it goes something like this:

Jesus was setting out on a journey, a path, a way that would eventually take him to cross. He had tried to make this clear to his disciples sometime earlier, but it seems they really didn't want to know where things might end up, but were more interested in fighting over who would get to be the line leader. Hard to lead when you don't know where you are going.

A person comes running up to Jesus. He thinks he knows where he wants to be going.

We don't know where this person came from; on the one hand he seems to be in quite the hurry. On the other hand, he falls down before Jesus. He asks the question:

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

At first hearing it sounds like the human question: Is there a way I can live forever?

But when we listen closer, he is mixing up two ideas:

Is his question “What must I do to gain eternal life?”

Or is his question “Who must I be to inherit eternal life?”

You see, when it comes to inheritance, it is not about what we do, but about whose we are.

Even though I, of course, had been the good child and one of my brothers was the not good child, we both received the same inheritance because we both belonged to the same parents.

It seems Jesus sets out to answer the question as though it were about performance, “What must I do to gain eternal life?” You know how to be the good child:

Don’t take your neighbor’s life

Don’t take your neighbor’s wife

Don’t take your neighbor’s stuff

Don’t take your neighbor’s character

That all sounds pretty familiar and basic—but then Jesus changes things up.

What should come next in the list is “Don’t even think about your neighbor’s life, or wife, or stuff, or character”

More familiarly put “Don’t covet what your neighbor has”.

But Jesus throws in “Don’t defraud anyone”.

Now Jesus likely put this in so that we would not question how it is that this person ended up having a lot of stuff. “No, I did not defraud”. I did honor my father and my mother.

I have pretty much been the good child.

And now the narrator tells us Jesus looked at him and loved him. Jesus loved him. I wonder if the person understood that. When you think about this story, when you wonder about living it out, do you remember Jesus loves you?

With love in his eyes, Jesus says

“You’re late on one thing.”

“You’re behind the curve”

You’re holding on pretty tight.

You’re lugging a heavy wagon of paraphernalia, it’s going to be hard to keep up.

When your focus is on what’s back there, it’s pretty tough to look ahead.

Ahh! But if you stop holding on to stuff; if you open your hands, you will be able to hold a little piece of heaven.

Let go. Let go. And follow me.

The person in the story was beside himself. He had not prepared himself to hear such a message.

I don’t know what he thought Jesus would say.

Maybe

“Be a good host”

“Welcome the stranger”

“pray more”

“eat less”

“study the Bible”

“write your congress person”

“be generous with beggars”

“proclaim your faith at the super market”

“stop getting drunk”

“Give away half your closet and don’t fill it up again”

“be sure you are worshipping somewhere every week”

“don’t neglect the sacraments”

“one day a week put your phone away and never look at it”  
“eat your vegetables and call you mother”

Surely the person would have been willing to do any of these things.  
Anything but let go of everything.

What are you hanging onto this morning?  
Does the thought of letting go shock you?  
Is the cost of following Jesus just too much for you?  
What keeps us from letting go?  
Is it our need for security?  
Is it our lack of trust in God?  
Is it fear?  
What keeps us from holding on to Jesus?  
Is it that our love lies elsewhere?  
When Jesus looks at us in love, do we look at Jesus and then run the other way?

This is an interesting week for this passage to show up in the lectionary. If you had asked me last week to bring in 8% of my 401K this week, would I have let go of it and done it? Probably not. Yet this week, it disappeared somewhere.

Maybe it's easy for you to give up money and power and status.  
Maybe you already know what it is to let go of wealth.  
Maybe you identify most with Peter who said, “Look! We have left everything to follow you.”

Regardless of your place in this story, Jesus promises that in letting go we take hold.  
In giving up, we receive.  
In walking away from our stuff, we step into the Kingdom of God.  
The kingdom of God cannot be contained solely in a distant place that we inherit after someone dies, rather the Kingdom of God according to the Gospel of Mark, is where Jesus is.  
“The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God has come near! Turn around and believe the Good News!”  
Each week we pray “Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

In the end, this story is less about inheriting eternal life—that is impossible for us, but God has it all covered. No, in the end this story is about our willingness to open our eyes to see Jesus' love;  
to open our hands to take Jesus' hand;  
to open our hearts to trust Jesus' heart.

In his book *Praying with Open Hands*, Henri Nouwen tells a story. I think I have told it to you before, but it is an important story, so I will tell it again.

*An elderly woman was brought to a psychiatric center. She was wild, swinging at everything in sight, and frightening everyone so much that the doctors had to take everything away from her. But her fist was closed tight. What she was gripping must have been very important to her, for she would not let it go. If she lost what was in her fist, perhaps she would lose her very self. If they deprived her of that last possession, she would have nothing more; perhaps she thought she would be nothing more. Finally for her own safety two people pryed open her fist and what did they find inside her grip? A single little coin. (this is a paraphrase of how Nouwen told the story)*

Jesus doesn't pry open our hands; but rather gives a simple invitation to let go. Let go and follow me.

You may scroll down to page 5 of this document. I invite you to take a small coin in your hand. Grip the coin. Let it represent the thing you simply do not, cannot let go of. Let it represent the thing that Jesus is saying to you, "Let go of it. Let go and follow me."

You are invited to sing verse 1-4—remember it is God giving the summons. Following those verses have a time of quiet. Let Jesus look on you in love; a time for you to listen to Jesus' call to follow. After that time, sing verse 5 as your response to Christ.

May the One who looks upon you in love,  
The One who calls you to let go and follow  
Take your hand in  
Honor, grace, delight and peace  
Now and forevermore.

# 726 Will You Come and Follow Me

## The Summons

Capo 3: (D) (A7) (Bm) (Em7) (Asus) (A)  
 F C7 Dm Gm7 Csus C

1 "Will you come and fol - low me if I but call your name?  
 2 "Will you leave your-self be-hind if I but call your name?  
 3 "Will you let the blind - ed see if I but call your name?  
 4 "Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call your name?  
 5 Lord, your sum-mons ech - oes true when you but call my name.

(D) (A7) (Bm) (Em7) (G) (D)  
 F C7 Dm Gm7 B<sup>b</sup> F

Will you go where you don't know and nev - er be the same?  
 Will you care for cruel and kind and nev - er be the same?  
 Will you set the pris-oners free and nev - er be the same?  
 Will you quell the fear in - side and nev - er be the same?  
 Let me turn and fol - low you and nev - er be the same.

(Em7) (G) (F#m7) (G) (Asus)(A)  
 Gm7 B<sup>b</sup> Am7 B<sup>b</sup> Csus C

Will you let my love be shown; will you let my name be known;  
 Will you risk the hos - tile stare should your life at - tract or scare?  
 Will you kiss the lep - er clean, and do such as this un - seen,  
 Will you use the faith you've found to re-shape the world a - round,  
 In your com - pa - ny I'll go where your love and foot-steps show.

(D) (A7) (Bm) (Em7) (G) (D)  
 F C7 Dm Gm7 B<sup>b</sup> F

will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?"  
 Will you let me an - swer prayer in you and you in me?"  
 and ad - mit to what I mean in you and you in me?"  
 through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?"  
 Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

The first four stanzas of this ballad-like hymn are understood to be in the voice of Christ, with the fifth reflecting the individual singer's response. Created for this traditional Scottish tune, the text was written to mark the conclusion of a youth volunteer's time of ministry.

Notes and highlights for  
**With Open Hands**  
Nouwen, Henri J. M.

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**Introduction: With Clenched Fists**

**Highlight (pink) - Page 20 · Location 107**

The resistance to praying is like the resistance of tightly clenched fists . This image shows a tension , a desire to cling tightly to yourself , a greediness which betrays fear . A story about an elderly woman brought to a psychiatric center exemplifies this attitude . She was wild , swinging at everything in sight , and frightening everyone so much that the doctors had to take everything away from her . But there was one small coin that she gripped in her fist and would not give up . In fact , it took two people to pry open that clenched hand . It was as though she would lose her very self along with the coin . If they deprived her of that last possession , she would have nothing more and be nothing more . That was her fear .