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Did you ever wonder who would classify as the rich young man today? Perhaps he has an undergraduate degree from Harvard and an MBA from Stanford. He is a partner in a tech firm. He has every electronic device possible and is interfaced with every conceivable social media. His cell phone is never turned off. He is married has two kids but on the road a lot. He drives a Ferrari while his wife drives a Mercedes Benz SUV. He goes to all of his kids' soccer games and apologizes to them if he doesn't make them. He raises all kinds of money for charity, especially for his kids' private school.

He and his wife collect fine art, know the best fine wines and specialize in finding out of the way gourmet restaurants. Every other summer, they take the family on European vacations or a safari to Africa. He is a big contributor to political campaigns that benefit his company and personal wealth and is a member of two civic organizations, the best health club in town, and the most exclusive country club.

He was baptized and confirmed as a child. Today he and his family are on the parish register, but they attend infrequently – too many out-of-town trips and too many kids' games interfere. He doesn't remember the new minister's name or if the minister is a male or female but gives \$500 to the church every year. Yet with all he has, somehow he feels there should be more to life and that complete happiness is eluding him.

This is the 21st century rich young man. However, all you have to do is downsize his wealth and the rich young man could be anyone who is very busy, highly committed to a variety of things but feels they're lacking something to make them wholly happy.

Oscar Wilde once said, "There are two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it." In the last several years studies have concluded: "If material well-being leads to happiness, why is it that the crew on the flagship of capitalist affluence is becoming increasingly addicted to prescription and street drugs and drugs for falling asleep, for waking up, for staying slim, and for escaping boredom?"

Writer Anne Lamott spent years working toward the day when she would have enough money. "I imagined," she says, "that if I just got to a certain level of solvency I'd be okay. I'd stop thinking about it. Then I got to that level and discovered that the drug of choice is called 'more.' I always think, 'Oh, if I just had a certain amount of stocks. If I just had some real equity in this house. If I just had a trust fund. If I just had this or that, then I'd be okay.'" "But you know," she says, "it's got to be an inside job. You can't own it or amass it or capitalize on it and think that it's going to fill up the God-shaped hole inside you."

In today's Gospel a rich young man asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. He has been a faithful man, following the commandments and doing everything that he has been taught to do. He wants to know how to fill the hole inside of him. He did not expect Jesus' answer to him is to sell all of his possessions and give it to the poor.

The text says the man "was shocked and went away grieving." I imagine he was shocked because he considered his wealth an entitlement — a symbol not only of his worldly accomplishments, but also of God's favor. How terrible to be told that his best credential was a liability and a burden. How grievous to realize that God's kingdom was

not custom designed for his ease. How shocking to encounter a God who is so scandalously honest who strips us of our entitlements and freely hands us reasons to walk away.

It was a depth charge that Jesus dropped into the gut of the rich young man. Jesus was telling him it's not about how much wealth in life you have it's about the choices you make with your life. Being rich or being poor has nothing to do with finding favor with God. You can't find favor with God.

You see this young man's question to Jesus reveals that he really believes it's possible to earn righteousness, establish a relationship with God, secure a place in heaven, and satisfy his soul's longing for God through his own efforts: "What must I do to inherit eternal life."

He wants to know: "Is there some spiritual to do list; some program I can work, some performance criteria that I can follow so that I can get right with God? Just tell me what it is and I will work the program. What's it going to take from me to get a passing grade with God?"

Jesus' response causes the color to drain from the young man's face: "One thing you lack... go sell everything and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven, then come and follow me."

Now let me address the young man's question about eternal life. Eternal life isn't something we achieve after we die. Rather eternal life exists in the here and now.

Eternal life means a deep connection with the ageless and invincible values of the Kingdom of God. Eternal life describes the quality of relationships between human beings and Christ. We have glimpses of it when the things that we seek and truly desire, goodness, unity, beauty, truth, and love become present with us. And to experience eternal life is to extract ourselves from the entanglements of this world that hold us back from opening ourselves to the goodness of God. Eternal life means risking everything for all those virtues here and now.

So that's why Jesus' tells him to sell all his possessions. The point here is not that everyone needs to sell their possessions in order to get right with God. What Jesus is really saying to this wealthy, powerful and remarkably good man who has a sincere desire to be right with God: "I commend you for your effort... but it's just not enough! Your things, your possessions are getting in your way. You have not given wholeheartedly of yourself to God. Your things are blocking your understanding what it is to live a life with God. He is relying upon his goodness and his goods to get him through this life and into the next, and Jesus says, "Friend, that's just not good enough. "Why is it hard for a rich person to get into heaven, harder than for a camel to get through the eye of a needle? Because when you let what you own, own you, it's really hard to realize how much you need God and other people.

Jesus is telling us that we need to find what it is in us that's a stumbling block--a detriment--to our living as children of God, and then do something about it. If we have many material possessions, we may need to see how we use them to help those less fortunate than ourselves. If we hold on to attitudes or prejudices or our self-righteousness, that exclude others then we need to change our ways. If we let leaders fill us with hate and fear of others we need to turn from them and turn towards God. If we've become so wrapped up in our own wants that we no longer care for our world or its people, then we need to look again at our call to stewardship. We need to do this as

individuals, and we need to do this as a faith community. It takes prayer, honesty, and a serious decision to want to live as a people of God.

If we're really serious about this re-examination--and we should be if we're going to call ourselves God's people then we'll find it to be a challenge. Jesus tells us all time and time again that he came to serve, not to be served. Our lives should be lives of service to each other, and many times that means letting go of what holds us back, those things that possess us or those things we want but don't need. We need to let go in order to reach out to others.

We have a choice. We can walk away shocked and grieving like the man in today's Gospel whose wealth and possessions truly owned him, or we can get on with the work of really living as God's people by being fulfilled and letting our hearts, feet, hands, eyes and thoughts continually move towards God. It's our choice. Amen.