

Sunday 13th October 2024; Trinity 20. Benefice Holy Communion Gilling

Do you want to be something, or do you want to do something? That is the unspoken question at the heart of Jesus' conversation with the man in today's gospel. It presents to us the tension between being and doing, between meaning and purpose. It's probably one of the unspoken questions in each of our lives that needs to be considered. If we don't ask ourselves it, at some point the unfolding story of our lives will.

What is the story of the man in today's gospel. He's done all the right things, he's been obedient and faithful, kept all the commandments since he was a child, been successful in life. We are told he has "many possessions." He's got power, position, prestige, possessions, and wealth. He appears to have done something with his life, and yet, he knows something is missing, so he asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" It's not a question about getting to heaven. It's about a meaningful life, about being someone.

But maybe he's asking the wrong question. He wants to know what he must *do*, as if the life he wants is something to be acquired, possessed, and gained by expenditure. He's seeking the missing piece of his life by the only means he knows, by acquisition. This is his purpose, but he has lost the meaning.

That is not opposing purpose and meaning, as if it is one or the other. It's not, because it must be both because you add purpose and meaning together you get 'value.' But this man has become so preoccupied with doing that he has forgotten about being, and his sense of value is absent. He considered the value of his life was marked and recognised only by what he had accomplished. It begs the question

when the time comes what will his obituary say, and ours? Most obituaries would describe what someone has done, not so much who we they but in the final analysis is the measure of our lives solely about what we have done? Does what we've solely done, represent who you and I are, and our value?

Don't you want to be more than what you've done? I wonder if that's why the man in today's gospel goes to Jesus with his question.

"You lack one thing.", Jesus answers to him. You can imagine him taking a mental inventory of his life, accomplishments, and possessions trying to work out what one thing he still lacks, picturing in his mind every item he owns, recalling everything he has done, and then wondering what he should do or get next. But Jesus is talking about *one thing*, not one *more* thing. In the Old Testament, the psalmist says, "One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord". Maybe the "one thing" being referred to here is to be connected to something bigger and beyond us, to know ourselves and our lives to be more than what we do or have, to recognize and trust that there is something transcendent about each one of us. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells Martha, "There is need of only one thing" because Martha was "worried and distracted by many things". Her life was divided; she was here and there but not anywhere. Maybe the "one thing" is about learning and paying attention to what really matters, being present and becoming whole. When the religious authorities questioned the man blind from birth whom Jesus had healed, he said, "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see". Maybe here, the "one thing" is about seeing with new eyes, gaining a deeper insight, living with a new level of consciousness, and awakening to the life that

is within us. St. Paul says that when he and Barnabas and Titus met the leadership in Jerusalem, “[The leadership] asked only one thing, that they remember the poor”.

Maybe the “one thing” here is compassion, caring for each other, being a community, and recognizing that our lives are one body in Christ.

Maybe the one thing common in all these ‘one things’ is finding value not just from doing but through the doing also finding a place of deep meaning, discovering those “peak experiences” when something touches, resonates with, or speaks to us; when we say, “Yes, this is it;” when it feels like we’ve come home; when we have an insight and it forever changes our life; when we feel alive and connected to ourselves, others, and the world; when we wholeheartedly give ourselves to another, when we lose ourselves in the moment; when we never want the moment to end.

What if you were the man in today’s gospel? What if Jesus said to you, “You lack one thing?” How would you respond? What would offer you more meaning in your life today from which you can discover true value? In what ways might your doing make a difference, not so much just by what you do but by who you are? What would you need to let go of to become more fully yourself and find God’s purpose for you?

If, “you lack one thing.”, it’s not a criticism, not a judgment, not a deficiency. It’s a door opening to new life. It’s an opportunity with God for whom nothing is impossible.

Thanks be to God.

