

“WORDS OF WISDOM: IV – SHARE!”

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Romans 12:9-13

Matthew 19:16-22

This has been some week! There’s been a lot of bad stuff in the news – a lot – the continuing, ever-escalating violence in the Middle East, another lost airplane, terrible wildfires out in Washington State, a tornado devastating a campground in Virginia – the list goes on and on. What a relief it was to occasionally turn on the news or pick up the paper and see something good and uplifting. That happened to me on Tuesday, when I saw pictures from something that certainly is not earth-shattering, or anything that will change the world, but it made me smile nonetheless – it was Prince William’s first birthday.

Now, like I said, in the scheme of life, and in the scheme of world events, a little prince’s first birthday is no big deal. But it was very sweet to see pictures of him and his parents, and to look back at pictures and film clips from the past year. He’s an adorable child, who clearly is adored by his doting parents and the British public, and he appears to be pretty normal – or at least as normal as one can be who is destined to become a king one day. He’s curious like all children that age, picking things up and looking at them, and not infrequently, putting them in his mouth. He’s adventurous like all children that age, taking those tentative first steps, and then taking off like wildfire, walking all over the place. And he appears to have the same tendency of all children that age to want what he wants, and taking it, if necessary.

One of the clips they showed this week was William at a play date with other children, it might have been on their trip to Australia, and right while his mother was holding him up next to another toddler, old William just reaches out and grabs the child’s stuffed animal – he takes it right out of his hands. The next thing you know his mother Kate is taking it out of his hands and returning it to its rightful owner, and if we could have heard it, I suspect she might have been whispering in his ear, “No, no, we have to share.”

“We have to share.” It’s one of the earliest things we learn from our parents, because it seems, taking things for ourselves seems to be one of the first things we do in life. It’s actually not too surprising, because for the first months of our lives, it’s all about us. Everything. Everything in the world revolves around a newborn child. So I guess we kind of get used to it, and then when everything stops revolving around us, we don’t really like it – and do our best to gain back that control, by doing things like taking toys from our friends.

We kind of like being in control, having things our way, having things be about us and our comfort. We get used to it. Preacher James Moore calls it our “cater-culture,” that in our world, we’re catered to, and we come to expect the best in everything – the best service, the best results, the best scheduling, the best of everything. And if we don’t get the best whatever it is – service, answers, timing – we’re disappointed. (James W. Moore, *Yes, Lord, I Have Sinned, But I Have Several Excellent Excuses*, p. 49)

Far too often, it’s all about us. Life becomes all about us. And that appears to be the case with the man who went up to speak with Jesus in today’s Gospel lesson from Matthew. He’s a young man who has heard Jesus speaking, and it appears that what he has heard has made him a little uncomfortable. So he asks Jesus for clarification, if you will. He wants to know what he has to do to get into heaven, and then a little later on, he tries to get Jesus to be more specific, to tell him exactly how much, what it will take, what rules does he have to follow to get there. At first, it looks like he’s doing okay, he’s on the right track – after all, he’s been keeping the commandments (loving his parents, not lying, not killing, not committing adultery). But then, Jesus keeps going, and then, the young man’s in trouble.

“What you need to do,” Jesus says, “is sell what you have and take care of the poor. That will do it. You’ll have your treasure in heaven. Come on, follow me.” And sadly, the scripture tells us that that young man couldn’t do it – he couldn’t give up control, he couldn’t give up the sense that all he had was about him and for him – he couldn’t do it – so he went away grieving, because he couldn’t share.

Does hearing what Jesus said to that young man make you as uncomfortable as it makes me? “Sell all you have to take care of the poor.” It would have been so much easier for us to hear if Jesus has said something like, “You’re doing great young man. You’re following the commandments, you’re trying to live a good life, keep on keeping on, you’re on the right track.” That would have made me feel better at least.

But Jesus loved that young man, and indeed loves us more than just trying to make us feel better. Jesus loved him and loves us enough to invite us into full and abundant life, and if that means making us squirm occasionally – so be it. His task with that young man, and his task with us, is not to just make us feel good about ourselves – His task is to invite us to know life in all its fullness and abundance – and sometimes the path to that kind of life requires a lot of us. It requires us to change our attitudes from – “It’s all about me” – to “it’s all about all of us together.” It requires us to “share.”

So today, I want to spend a few moments with you talking about what it is that Jesus wants us to share. It boils down to three things really – our time, our talents, and our treasures.

Time. One preacher said this of time: “Time is our most precious resource. It is perishable and irreplaceable. God in His grace has given us all the same amount – 24 hours per day. The quality, joy, and impact of our lives are directly related (he says) to how wisely we use the time we have.” (On-line, Preaching.com, “Time, Our Most Precious Resource,” William R. Bouknight)

Time is precious to us, and I don’t know about you, but the older I get, the faster it flies. We spend a lot of time figuring out how best to spend our time. We have calendars, daytimers, smartphones, computers – all of which we use to schedule what we will do in those 24 hours each of us is given each day. And increasingly, everyone seems to have too much to do and too little time to do it. And now, Jesus says, share your time for the sake of others!

All of us have to decide if we’ll do it or how we’ll do it. But I can guarantee you this, it won’t happen unless you make it happen. There’s a woman by the name of Donna who struggled with the same question. How can I make time for someone else? Well, she did it. She decided to give an hour a week to mentor an elementary school child. She carved out the time that she didn’t really have, but she did it anyway. It was something she had done when she was young, single and didn’t have any children, and now it was something she would do again. So she became a mentor to a little boy named John.

John didn’t get much support or many opportunities at home, so the attention he got from Miss Donna made a tremendous impact on him. Somewhere along their journey together, Donna’s husband died suddenly. She was devastated, and on the day of his funeral, as she stood in line to receive visitors at the reception following the service, suddenly a little hand grabbed hold of hers – it was her little buddy John. He took her hand and then he stood next to her the whole night as she greeted others. He wouldn’t leave her side. She had been there for him, and now he was there for her. When others tried to get him to go and get something to eat, he still wouldn’t leave her side. Her pastor says that the love that flowed between them was almost palpable and touched everyone in that room.

But that’s not all. While John stood next to Miss Donna, a man came up to her in the line. He had flown to Houston from Chicago for the funeral. Thirty-eight years earlier, when he was in the first grade, Donna had mentored him as well. And whenever he returned to Houston, he would make a special attempt to stop by and see her. On this sad occasion, he said with his words and his very presence, “Miss Donna, you were the first person to ever believe in me. You shared your love with me then, now I’m here to share my love with you.” (James W. Moore, *There’s a Hole in Your Soul That Only God Can Fill*, p. 38)

Jesus says, “Share your time.” It’s one of the most precious gifts you can give another person – your time. It’s not just all about us. I had to laugh when I read this week about a conversation a pastor had with a potential new member. The person said to the pastor, “I want to join the church because I want to be fed.” Do you know what the pastor said back to him? “Well, that’s fine, but we all would be

better off if you would take off your bib and put on an apron!” (Moore, *Yes, Lord*, p. 51)

Time. How are you sharing your time? Is it all about you or are you choosing to spend some time for and with others as well?

How about your talents? That’s the second thing I think Jesus wants us to share – the talents that God has given us. Now, before you start to balk, and say I don’t do anything special, let me remind you that God has gifted every one of you in a unique way. Every one of us has something or some things that we can do well. The question today is: what are you doing with those talents? Are you using them to further the Kingdom of God, or are you hiding them under a bushel (as the scripture says)?

The world needs the gifts you have. The church needs the gifts you have. Your neighbors need the gifts you have. Are you willing to share them?

We have so many gifted people in this church, and it is amazing to see them put those gifts to work – in the classrooms, teaching children, youth and adults the stories of Jesus; in the choir loft singing praises and leading us as we sing; in circles where prayer shawls and baby blankets are knitted together with love; in repairs around the church that are cared for with those gifted with tools and skills. The list goes on and on, and goes out of the church as well – building ramps with Christmas in April, repairing homes on our mission trip, driving people to and from worship or to and from doctor’s appointments. It’s wonderful to see people putting their talents to work for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

How are you doing that? What gifts has God given you and how are you using them? Are you using them for others, beyond just yourself? I pray that you are, because that’s why God gave them to you. If you’re not sure how to use your gifts, stay tuned, because in a couple of months we’ll be having a Stewardship Fair, and we can help you find the perfect fit.

So, God calls us to share our time, and our talents, and thirdly, God calls us to share our treasures. This is where the young man got into trouble – parting with his treasures. And this is where a lot of us get into trouble too. Because we’re so used to piling up our treasures, instead of sharing them. It’s what the world tells us to do. Pick up any magazine in any given month, and I’ll guarantee you that one of the articles heralded on the cover will be something like, “How to make more, or how to save more, or how to have more in your retirement.” We’re fixated on our money and how to make it grow and grow and grow.

Now, I’m not saying that God doesn’t want us to have money, no, in fact, he’s given us the gifts and talents we need to work in such a way that we earn money. But once again the question is – what’s it all about? What’s it all for? Is it all for me? “No,” Jesus says, “it’s not. Share.”

How you share and what you share of the money you have is between you and God. But I can tell you this – how you share and what you share of your money is a statement of faith. So if someone looked at your checkbook, or your bank statement, what would they see about your faith?

Jesus knew that that young man would never know true joy and a true and abundant life until he experienced the joy of sharing his treasure, his money. If you share your treasure, your money, you know what Jesus was talking about.

We've seen it around here. Last year, when we decided to take money the church had been given and share a lot of it, amazing things happened. You might remember that we spent a portion of it on renovating our sanctuary, but then we sent a significant amount of money to Africa where two wells were drilled and now hundreds of people have fresh water every day, no longer having to walk miles to carry water, and not even clean water, back to their village. We shared our money and they have a better life, a healthier life, a life God wants them to have!

And we took some more of that money and put it into a program for Thomson Estates Elementary School, the school where the children in the neighborhoods around our church attend. This week, Gretchen Ginder, Nancy Mitchell and I met with some of the leaders of the school, and you should have seen their eyes light up and their excitement over the possibilities of some of the things our money is going to make happen in the coming year. They almost couldn't believe that we were willing to do it! It's so counter-cultural to the way the world is these days – and here we came in just wanting to help in whatever way we could – sharing our treasures that God has given us.

That kind of joy is what Jesus wanted that young man to experience, but sadly, he wasn't willing to take the risk, to give up his tight control of what he had, and he walked away from the joy.

A man by the name of Dan Skaripato tells how he went on a trip to Alaska to see the famous Mt. McKinley, but he never got to see it, because when he was there, clouds had rolled in, and blocked it from his view. I would found that hard to fathom when I read it, except that my poor sister Susan has been to Seattle to see our brother Jeff several times and has never seen Mt. Rainier because every time the clouds rolled in and blocked her view.

In much the same way, that young man's view of the life Jesus was calling him to, was blocked because of his tight grip on his possessions. He couldn't see the possibilities, because he couldn't let go.

Friends, is anything blocking you from the abundant life God wants you to be living? Is anything blocking you from sharing your time, your talents and your treasures? I hope not, but if there is, my prayer is that you will trust in God, and have the courage to step out. My dear friends, please don't walk away from the joy God has in store for you when you share. May it be so. Amen.

Amen.