

Text: [Mark 10:13-21](#)

Date: March 17, 2019 – Lent 2

Title: “Presence”

Theme: How can we see the presence of God in the present moment?

Intro

Last week, we began our series for Lent with a sermon about prayer
Continuing today to look at the various dimensions of our membership
vows, today we’re going to talk about “presence”
What does it mean to model a Christ-like presence in the world?

Question

Are there things you can do or ways of thinking that help you stay present
in the moment?

Sermon

We all talk a lot about how, as we age, time seems to accelerate
Yesterday was Christmas and tomorrow will be Easter

I think about what it was like when I was younger
Summers off from school went on forever

I don’t quite understand the mystery of time
I get to the end of the day sometimes and wonder how it’s 5 o’clock already
The first couple days of a vacation seems to last forever, like Saturday,
Sunday, Monday, Tuesday –
but as you get later in the week it goes by so quickly

I can’t help thinking it has something to do with our mindset
And specifically how present we are in the moment

2

I don't know anyone today who doesn't struggle with this
It is the curse of a world that spins ever faster
It's hard to be able to shut off thinking about what's going on tomorrow, or
later this week, to be right here, right now
It's hard to shut off our fears and worries about: the family, the company,
the church, the nation, the world

I have realized something over the past couple of weeks – and when I
realized it I felt pretty sad
I very seldom remember my dreams
But lately, it seems when I do remember – you know what I seem to be
doing in them?
I'm planning something, managing something, organizing something
I wake up and I'm like – “Wow, that was a productive night at work!”

(BTW, I'm not going to be here next weekend, I think I need to take a
couple days off!)

2

Jesus told the crowds, “if you don't enter the kingdom as a little child, you
will never enter it”
Now, we have a hard time understanding what that means
We may think that it means there's a cynicism that sets in as we get older –
so either you come to faith as a child or you'll never have it

I guess that's one way of reading it
But I'd prefer to look at it a different way – first, I want you to notice the
language
“Enter the kingdom of God”
Tuck that away, I want to come back to it, that Jesus invokes the kingdom

Second, notice that he talks about entering the kingdom as a child on the
heels of an incident where he publicly rebukes his disciples
Parents are bringing their children to Jesus for a blessing
And Jesus is happy to see them, he welcomes them

But the disciples, apparently mindful of Jesus' time, are chasing these families away when Jesus says, "let the children come to me"
When Jesus says, "if you don't enter as a child, you will never enter" he's saying to his disciples –
Don't chase them away, because you have something to learn from these kids!

You all are worried about where we've got to be at 5:00
About getting to the next city, the next town
About the next preaching engagement
But that's not the point, is it?

These kids are here now, their families are here now
Sure, I can keep walking, and stay on schedule
I can arrive promptly to PREACH about loving people
But if along the way I fail to take the opportunity to actually LOVE people because it's going to make me 5 minutes late – well, then there's a problem, isn't there?

Living in the future – whether an hour in the future or 10 years in the future
Distracts us from right now
Not only distracts, but ROBS us of the present moment

Why do our spirits feel so depleted?
Because we don't actually live – we just plan to live!

Now, can any of us live entirely in the present, all the time?
No, honestly, I guess not.
Otherwise, we'd never get dinner on the table or finish that project or save for retirement or all the other good things that require advance planning
There is a reason why childhood is a temporary phase of life, after all!

3

I want to keep exploring this
Because there's a second part to today's reading
They may appear to be unrelated, but I don't think they are

The first part is about Jesus and the children
The second part is about the rich man whom Jesus tells to sell everything
and then to come and follow
Both reveal something about presence and the kingdom of God

It's interesting the way the man asks the question:
"What must I do to INHERIT eternal life?"
Where is this guy living, do you think? In the present, or in the future?
"Inherit" is an interesting word choice
Because "inherit" is ALWAYS future-oriented

He doesn't ask, "How can I live a good life now?"
"How can I be happy?"
"How can I experience the love of God right now?"

No, he asks, "how can I INHERIT eternal life?"
How do I get myself written into the will?

Which says something about his mindset
He thinks he's already figured out how to be happy in the present
He's convinced himself that "stuff" is sufficient for that
Good wine, good food, nice things

We didn't read verse 22, but it's telling on this point:
After Jesus says, "Go and sell everything you have, give the money to the
poor, and THEN you will have treasure in heaven,"
Verse 22 says, "When he heard this, he was shocked and went away
grieving, for he had many possessions."

The man came to Jesus asking a future question
Jesus gives him a future answer: "You want treasure in heaven?"
Here's what you need to do

But Jesus also answers a question the guy didn't ask
A question that pulls him out of the future and into the present

I think, because Jesus realizes the poor rich man needs someone to do
that for him
You want to be happy NOW? Jesus asks
The "Come and follow me"

The two ideas go together – after all, Jesus traveled light and was not about to hire a wagon train to carry all this guy's stuff around
“So if you want to do this,” Jesus says, “sell it.”
“If you're concerned about the future, don't worry.
The proceeds will be stored in heaven for you.
But this is what it's going to take to experience the fullness of joy and love in the present.”

4

The mistake we make in thinking about the kingdom of God is in reading the Bible as though it's only a future thing
This idea that it's where we go when we die or what happens when Jesus returns
That eternal life can't be today

But when we think that, it's NOT Jesus talking
That's the sensible adult in us talking
The one who is busy making plans for the future and figuring out how we get there
While never being PRESENT where we actually are

We dream of FUTURE joy while neglecting present joy
We dream of FUTURE love and ignore the love that's right in front of us
We dream of how we will make a difference in the FUTURE while passing up opportunities to make a difference NOW

You may think this is a little blasphemous, but I wonder:
Would we be more present if we knew that THIS – right here and right now – was all the heaven we were ever going to have?

What I hear Jesus saying over and over again in the gospels is this:
“It's not heaven that you need to be concerned about. I have that covered.”

What you need to be concerned about is being present here and now.
That's how you'll experience the kingdom.

When a child wants to go to the park, or for ice cream, you can't pacify them by saying, “we'll go next week”
That doesn't work

And yet we seem to be satisfied with faith that ignores the love, the joy, the
beauty God gives us moment by moment –
we substitute the hope of future glory for the gifts of the kingdom in the
present

This week, may we be dissatisfied
Dissatisfied with thinking that the gifts of the kingdom are reserved for the
future
And instead be present to Christ and to each other in the here and now

Amen.

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