

**Sermon**  
**October 10, 2021**  
**St. Benedict's Episcopal Church, Los Osos**  
**Mark 10:17-31**

We read the story of the rich man who wanted so desperately to follow God's commandments but drew the line when it came to following Jesus. Or was it drawing the line at divesting himself from his wealth. Or maybe giving it to the poor. I can imagine it might have been all of those things. We don't read much about someone walking away from Jesus sad.

You know, this wasn't the first time that Jesus had taken a chance calling a rich man to follow him. After all, there was Matthew, the tax collector. Matthew must have been present at the time of this present passage, because Jesus was starting on the journey, and where he went, this intentionally, his followers followed.

As a tax collector, Matthew also was of the richest people in the society of Jesus' time. Because he and others were sanctioned by the Roman Empire to collect the variety of taxes to support their occupation, they could become as wealthy as they wished. They could also add "overhead" to what was owed. They sold their souls, in a way, to be of use to the Romans. Which answers why they were not well regarded by the rest of Jewish society.

There is a newish television series called *The Chosen*, which chronicles the years of Jesus' ministry, especially in regard to those who followed him, who answered his call. I'm going to show you a clip of it, and don't worry, Jay received the

permission of the producers to do so. Thank you, Jay. The producers of The Chosen are Angel Studios, and information about the series is available at [TheChosen.tv](http://TheChosen.tv).

A little background. At this point in the story, Matthew knows the main characters already. He collected taxes from Simon and Andrew, James and John, and others in Capernaum. In fact, he had been spying on them to see if they were desperately fishing on the Sabbath, which was prohibited, at which point, Jesus came by and told them to drop their nets on the other side of the boat, which was ridiculous, because the whole group of them had been trying all night to catch something and were totally unsuccessful. But when the fishermen relented, they found their nets suddenly full to bursting, a catch, by the way, which when sold would satisfy all of their tax debt...well, the tax collector Matthew saw that too.

Matthew was smart, good with numbers and accounts, and he knew he was widely unpopular. He was careful about how he traversed the city, keeping a low profile. He was estranged from his parents for his choice of career. So that puts you in the context for this clip. (I was going to ask for feedback, but have reconsidered..)  
[Jay plays clip.]

What did you particularly notice? [Roman guard and bars on the window. Jesus called him by name. "Follow me." Beautiful interaction. Matthew hears Simon's objections. Smile, action. "Let me go." "Have you lost your mind?" Protection, money. Gives away key and ring. Celebration to host. The tablet.]

Why do you think Matthew said “Yes?” [He saw the miracle. Jesus’ charisma. The desire to do something positive. His feelings of estrangement. His discomfort with his wealth. Being neurally atypical.]

If it is possible to put yourself in Matthew’s place, what might you have done in the same situation?

Let us remind ourselves of the situation of this other potential disciple. [Rich, ardent, good Jew. Wants to be guaranteed eternal life. Jesus LOOKED at him and LOVED him. Go, sell what you have, give it to the poor, and FOLLOW ME! His countenance fell. He went away sorrowful. Jesus’ harsh words about a rich person entering the kingdom of heaven. With God (for God), all things are possible.]

What do you think kept the rich man from following Jesus’ words and him? [Religiosity. Wealth. Surprise at the call.]

What might have tipped the scales for the rich man to say “yes” to Jesus? [Non-attachment. Attraction to Jesus. Hanging around a little more. Maybe feeling more out of the mainstream.]

What does Jesus mean, “all things are possible with/for God?” Especially when it was not possible for the rich man to answer Jesus’ call?

[My plans were abbreviated by the excellent discussion and back and forth with members of the congregation, so not everything I planned on covering got covered. What follows is what I was going to use in case the discussion fell flat or didn’t take long.]

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Four centuries before Jesus lived, in the kingdom of China, there arose a compilation of poems about life and virtue called the Tao Te Ching, translated many ways, one of which is the Collection of the Virtue of the Tao. It is one of the scriptures of Taoism. And it influenced both Confucianism and Buddhism, as well as the mystical Sufi tradition.

The Tao is commonly translated as “The Way” but it can also mean “leading the way.” We are, like I preached on a few weeks ago, in mystical territory here. The Tao is thought to be the essential, unnameable process of the universe. It is what keeps the universe balanced and ordered. It is like water, undifferentiated, endlessly self-replenishing, soft and quiet, immensely powerful. Okay, my point is that Jesus either knew about the view of the Tao, or was tapping into it because, well, he was also the Way, or the Logos.

I bring this up because it related to Jesus’ calling of Matthew and of this rich man. It consists of about 80 chapters or poems. Here are a few excerpts:

Racing and hunting madden the mind.  
Precious things lead one astray.

The sage is shy and humble – to the world he seems confused.  
Others look to him and listen.  
He behaves like a child.

The Tao of heaven is to take from those who have too much  
and give to those who do not have enough.  
The human way is different.  
The human takes from those who do not have enough  
and gives to those who already have too much.  
What person has more than enough and gives it to the world?  
Only the person of Tao.

Be content with what you have;  
rejoice in the way things are.  
When you realize there is nothing lacking,  
the whole world belongs to you.

I will content myself with the results of our discussion and this introduction for some and reminder to others of the different way of Jesus. Like Jesus says to Simon, "Get used to different."