



Yearning for Eternal Life

October 10, 2021

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Psalm 90:1-6, 12-17; Mark 10:17-31
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Our lives join something bigger. That's God's claim, God's call we share whenever we come near the font. As we chatted about Avery's baptism, Brett and Katie smiled and explained her great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother wore her gown. Love enfolding, generation to generation, from long before we're born to all conceived through ages to come. And in baptism that intimate lineage broadens to envelop Avery and each of us in life together as the blanket made by our stitchers enwraps her shoulders. Do we promise to guide and nurture her and one another? Our lives join something bigger. It's beautiful, at best, from astounding wonders of earth and the vast universe, to caring human relationships.

And sometimes, that something bigger in life we share gets scary. Hurricanes, tornados, floods, fires. Climate change and consequences. Government and economic ups and downs affecting individuals with a job or a search, with resources to live or paucity that limits. Bigger life gets scary in our broken world with wars and prejudice wedded to power. COVID. Cancer. All clouding belief that our lives are in our control. That's what we're so often going for. Control in the little corner of the world, tiny speck of the cosmos where we dwell. Nothing unexpected we can't handle. Always hope, possibility we make happen.

For the Psalmist the bigger scope of existence evokes awe, wonder, humility, yearning for wisdom. Lord, you've been our dwelling place in all generations. In the span of time and eternity—a thousand years in our time like yesterday in eternity.

Amid the range of affliction and suffering, health and joy, fill us, God, with your steadfast love, your blessed favor. In the work of our hands, the capacity of humanity, reveal at best the presence and power of Divinity. Psalm 90 calls us to count our days—not so much in quantity on a calendar, rather in quality of care and commitment as we gain a wise heart. As we grow more aware of how our truest selves symbiotically entwine with God and all creation in Sacred Grace.

Friends, can we feel the holy yearning in Psalm 90? From everlasting to everlasting, Lord, we want to dwell in your Love. Even if in mortality we fade and wither, every morning we awake fill us with your life. As many days as we have, Lord, may we gratefully cherish each moment and generously offer ourselves in humble service. So we may we *share* life in goodness, joy, peace, abiding love and abundant possibility. Friends, feel that yearning as the pulsing heart of our being. “Our hearts restless until we come to rest in God,” as St. Augustine wrote ages ago. And as Jesus invites, “Come to me all you who are weary and I will give rest. Take my yoke upon you, my way of grace ... and you will find peace.” On a family vacation years ago, we popped into the Weston Priory and caught a noon prayer service. They read that text. And I was surprised as from some longing deep inside tears began to flow in me that wayward day. Friends, I remember thinking: isn’t that at some basic level what we all desire? Come to me. Even when weary, take my yoke, my purpose upon you. It’s easy to bear, Jesus smiles and encourages. And it’s the way to peace.

A restless man came to Jesus, Mark tells us. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Mark tells the story with no criticism. This is a good man. He’s committed. He’s demonstrated faithfulness. Jesus sees who he really is and loves him. So, what’s wrong? On the surface, a presenting issue is the man’s great wealth. And there’s something bigger, something deeper. You see, in the Bible eternal life isn’t just about what happens after we exhale our last breath. It’s about intimacy with God at

the heart of our whole being, as if Holy Loving Spirit fills our lungs with every inhale and oxygenates all we say and do. Our hands, words, wills—living faith by ever moving our world closer to the way God wants it to be in justice, freedom, and peace. This intimacy flows through humility. Trust. Reliance on Grace in and through all things.

What must *I do* to inherit eternal life? Here's the problem and the promise Jesus tries to make clear. This faithful one tries to maintain control of life. Trust, depend on self. That's the expectation, the illusion all his wealth affords. But this eternal bond with God, with Holy Love, isn't something we accomplish by 110% effort, ability to be perfect, proving we won't falter or fail. In society, now like 2000 years ago, that often measures human value by dollars, medals, titles; and defines a good life by material things, merit gained, Jesus says this is no game to win with money, status, or fine clothes. No sure success to secure, salvation to achieve on our own. However rich or poor, friends, here's what matters most, what defines our identity more than anything else. Each of us is a beloved child of God. That's wisdom. We are loved and want to love.

Yes, salvation is personal. Relationship with the Holy begins in our hearts. And scripture makes clear, time after time: *salvation is always shared in community*. relationship with God inextricably entwines, inseparably binds to relationship with others. It's Jesus' Great Commandment and Great Commission. Paul envisions us together as the body of Christ. For ancient Hebrews it was all about life they built together in this world according to the love and justice of God. As we commit all we have and all we can be and do to Jesus' way here's two brief bits from this gospel encounter to help us gain a wise heart.

1) Commandments cited—no murder, adultery, stealing, slander—are ones about community life, bigger than self alone. Give your money to the poor, Jesus tells the man. Pour out your accumulated sense of accomplishment, security,

prosperity, resources for any possibility on your own. Beyond all beauties of our individuality, bigger life shared in love reaches eternity.

2) The man grieves because he has a lot of money; he's invested a lot in that money. Give away that false dependence, Jesus urges. Give your heart to Grace. Give your life to Holy Love. Give your hands and feet to service more than reaching easy bliss. Seek grace. Receive it with gratitude. Respond with generosity.

In the very next scene, according to Mark, Jesus tells his close friends and followers for the third time that he's bound for the cross. Grief. Pouring self out in generous service. God's way, truth, life embodied every step by Jesus ... unto resurrection. I wonder what we'd talk about with Jesus. To what we give heart and effort, on what we choose to depend, in what we invest on our quest for security. What comes between us and God, like the man's money, that God can turn to use in the way of eternal life. Dollars in our wallet and bank account. Physical or mental ability. The home and all furnishings of success. Professional status or accrued privilege. All these things aren't inherently bad, of course, friends. How do we relate to them? How we relate to God in grace through them in the wider call to living faith?

Grace. That's how Serene Jones names the something bigger. The core of the Eternal More we all long for. God. We're able to see and be part of something bigger not by more rigorously asserting ourselves but by releasing, letting ourselves be enfolded, embraced, raised into that bigger reality—"the ground from which we come." "Eternity." It's a way of life, a state of being, Jones says. Believing in ultimate truth of Grace—a loving yes to all existence. Reaching for that goodness. Committing every part of heart, mind, body, and soul yearning for connection to all other life. And in that yearning, becoming something bigger.¹

Here's one other blessed anecdote about our baptism. I explained to Brett and Katie how we use oil scented with frankincense and myrrh to trace the cross of each

baptized person's forehead. Oil comes from ancient rituals for healing and for calling an individual to special purpose. The scent often lingers through the day. Katie said Avery's going to love it because she likes to get little dabs of essential oil behind her ear. This commitment we make, friends, this yearning is something like that—a scent of Holy Love we catch, a sense of call that settles our heart and shapes the work of our hands.

Tis our season of pledging and budgeting, making our commitment for our next year here at church. Truth is, God's call to stewardship is one we answer every day of our lives—receive sacred blessings with gratitude and serve generously giving, pouring out ourselves for others and the common good. It's singing and ringing in our choirs bigger and better together than we can do alone. It's committees and commitments to tend a garden and serve a meal; to study together and tutor others. It's joining our worship and service with our kin in Christ across the street in Bronson Park today. It's about cherishing every moment. It's as intimate as sitting with our beloved through another round of treatment, as the body or mind is faltering. It's standing up when equity, fairness, resources for all to live abundantly don't seem to be way God wants for our world; and speaking up about what we believe to be right, in our public conversations, at work, or school or wherever. One last bit from our baptism. After Avery's hesitancy and anxiety, when I signed the cross of her forehead or eyes locked and stayed that way throughout. She likely won't remember moment. I pray we'll remember how God sees us with love, claims us like the faithful man with Jesus, calls us to join something bigger than ourselves. For then we have treasure in heaven as Jesus says: come and follow me.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

ⁱ Serene Jones, *Call it Grace: Finding Meaning in a Fractured World* (Penguin Random House: 2019), 78, 106.