

Looked at with Love

Mark 10:17-22

If you were to have looked around campus a couple of weeks ago, you would have seen a strange sight. In addition to the usual sight of students wearing shorts in any kind of weather, or pajama pants to class, you would have seen guys in suits and girls in business attire.

Different career fairs for the different colleges and majors were held, and students hoping for jobs, internships, or co-ops were headed to try to make a good first impression.

One of the most important things to bring to the career fair is a resume. Academics may need a c.v., creatives may need a portfolio of their work, but the same principles apply. A properly proofread, properly filled resume is key.

Especially now, when all of the resumes may get sorted by algorithm and never seen by a human being without the proper keywords, a resume is important. It's the first thing that will get looked at. It's the first step in getting your foot in the door. It's the first step in getting the life you want.

The man in today's Gospel lesson thought he had an impeccable resume. This man, often referred to as the rich young ruler based on the details found in the other Gospel accounts of this encounter, had kept, or at least claims to have kept, the commandments from his youth. He hadn't murdered, he hadn't committed adultery, and he hadn't stolen or lied. He honored his parents. He was wealthy and educated. He was confident enough to come up to Jesus and ask him a question, but knowledgeable and well-mannered enough to kneel at his feet while doing so.

But he also knew there was something lacking. His resume placed him well for success, but it didn't seem to be enough. Looking at his successful life, he thought there might be more. This man, for all his wealth and

accomplishments, realized that something was missing in his life.

Also to his credit is that he knew, or suspected, or hoped, that Jesus had the answer he was looking for. He comes to Jesus for a reason. He is, in every respect, a righteous man. He is, as we discover at the end of the reading, a very rich man. And yet his life is still somehow lacking. He is aware of a metaphorical hole inside himself that has not been filled either by riches or righteousness. He is still searching, still seeking, still hoping against hope that Jesus can meet his needs or at least point him in the right direction.

And Jesus does. Jesus listens to his question. Jesus listens to affirmative answer to his own question about the commandments. Jesus tells him his resume is missing something. There's a big blank spot there he needs to fix. He needs to sell all he has, give to the poor, and then follow Jesus.

Jesus doesn't tell him this to be mean. Jesus doesn't insult him like he often does while sparring with the Pharisees. Jesus doesn't get righteously angry at how this man doesn't get it. Instead, Jesus looks at him with love, with compassion. Jesus sees what this man needs, and invites him to find it.

Jesus doesn't want the young man to go away. Jesus wants him to get rid of what is keeping him from following. But instead, the man goes away full of sorrow. We're told it's because he has great possessions, great wealth. And that certainly seems to be a problem.

Perhaps the problem is not just giving away his wealth. The problem is giving up his position, how others view him. To be wealthy was to be seen as blessed by God. Giving up the physical wealth was one thing. Giving up the acclaim for

being wealthy was something else. When I talk about money in premarital counseling, we talk about how money is important not just for its own sake, but for what it represents. We talk about how it can represent status or security or control or enjoyment. Money can mean many things, and not just be important for its own sake.

The problem, too, is that the rich young man had kept the commandments, but only the ones we describe as being of the second table, the ones that describe our relationship with other people. We see in his reaction that he is struggling with the first commandment. He is struggling with putting his trust in God first, in God alone, instead of putting his trust in his wealth and possessions. He is struggling with pride.

Our resumes don't work either. As much as we have done, we can do nothing to inherit eternal life. We can try to point to how we have kept the commandments, how we have loved our neighbors and honored our parents, but it's not enough. We fall short far too often. Fortunately our resume doesn't determine if we inherit eternal life. God loves us apart from our accomplishments.

While having a good resume is one way to get a job or an internship or a co-op, it's not the only way. The other way is to know someone. Maybe your dad works with someone in the company. Maybe a fraternity brother or sorority sister a couple of years ahead of you works there, and can put in a good word for you. Our resumes, work or otherwise, can't get us in with God. But Jesus can. Jesus does. Jesus took his perfect resume to the cross, and there he swapped his perfect resume with our imperfect ones. Because we know Jesus, and are known by Jesus we are on the right path.

When Jesus is on the cross, he looks down with love. He looks with love at the women who stayed with him, even when his disciples did not. He looks with love at those who crucify him, praying, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." He looks with love from the cross at everyone who put him there, calling them to leave their self-righteousness behind and take his righteousness instead. He looks at us with love from the cross, and calls us to do the same, leave our self-righteousness behind and take up his righteousness.

Jesus died to give us life. Eternal life isn't just something for the future after we die. Eternal life is in the here and now too. It's peace at a time when anxiety is at a seemingly all-time high. It's joy in the midst of sorrow, hope when the world seems hopeless. It's fulfillment that comes not from a full resume, but from a restored relationship with God.

We don't know what happened to the young man after he leaves Jesus. We don't know if he ever changed his mind or not. We don't know what the impact of his conversation with Jesus was. But we trust that he was at least given a lot to think about, and that his leaving Jesus wasn't a firm no, it was a not yet. As Oswald Chambers wrote, "Jesus did not go after him, He let him go. Our Lord knows perfectly that when once His word is heard, it will bear fruit sooner or later."

Following Jesus doesn't lead to a guaranteed job or internship. In fact, it can lead to hardships and challenges. Yet it also leads to joy. It leads to hope. It leads to life. It leads to more than the life you want; it leads to the life you need. It leads to a life with Jesus, the one who looks at us with love and compassion.

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