

31-Jul-2016 Sermon
“The Yes is the Promise of Living”
Brian Lennstrom

Today’s Gospel reading is known in scholarly circles as the “Anacortes Passage” because it relates to retirement and financial planning. But it turns out that by our standards Jesus is not such a great financial advisor: He’s no Suze Orman; He could not get a job at Edward Jones; and when Jesus talks about money—unlike EF Hutton—people don’t listen.

So we come to the passage with our questions about retirement and our questions about money. But if we want answers, we had better turn to Suze Orman or Edward Jones or Google. When we want answers, we get good advice from them. But when we want answers from the Bible, we just get a story about money that scares us to death!

That’s because the Bible is not primarily a book of answers. It’s not an owner’s manual. Only *secondarily* is the Bible a book of answers; *primarily*, it’s a book of questions. It’s a book of questions—and they aren’t questions *to* God; questions *from* God. Every time we read it; every time we hear it; every time we take the Eucharist, we should ask, “What’s the question?”

So the question from God is, “Why is money so important to you? Can’t you think of something better to do with your life than just be busy and especially be busy around money?”

The trouble is, money and busyness doesn’t keep their promises. Now money keeps some of its promises. When I’m famished, Money might say, “Hey, take me up to the Fidalgo drive-in and trade me for some food and I promise that you won’t be hungry any more.”

But in the end, when it’s just you in a bed surrounded by people who love you—in the end, when you ask Money for a few more days or even a few more hours, Money will not keep its promises. And I don’t think God will say it then, but He might say it *now*, when we’ve got a little time left: “You fool. Who told you that busyness and money was a good use of your time?” It’s a hard thing to hear, but it’s not as hard as anxiety.

A man once prayed, “God, if you gave me some more money, some extra time, and some more talents, I would use that money, that time and those talents for you, and for your kingdom.” And God said to Himself, “You know, I don’t usually do that kind of thing, but... okay.” So God gave the man more money, more time and more talents. But the man did not use that money, time or talents for God or His kingdom. Instead, he got busy. So God took away the money, the time and the talents. And then the man prayed again: “God, if you gave me *back* that money, that time, and those talents, I would use them for you....”

So what’s the way out? We can’t wave a magic wand and make the anxiety disappear and make the grain harvest itself and have the children raise themselves.

The last three words of this passage are the way out. “Rich toward God.” Be rich toward God. Jesus says, set aside all this busyness. Busyness can’t keep all the promises we force it to make. But Jesus keeps His promises. In Second Corinthians, Paul says that the promises of God are Yes in Jesus Christ. That in Him it has *always* been Yes. No matter *how many* promises. That there are as many promises as there are activities and chores and anxieties and issues and

problems and heartaches. That when we live in the Yes and in the promises we accumulate wealth for God; our tasks become filled not only with accomplishment but also with meaning. Solid, dependable meaning. That the promises and the Yes are better than distraction because they're healthier. Busyness can distract you and that relieves a bit of your anxiety but it's not altogether healthy. Busyness is like a doughnut for your soul.

So, what are these promises about? Well, according to the New Testament, these promises are about *living*. Jesus says that He has come to bring us life, and to bring it abundantly. Spiritual life, physical life, emotional life, eternal life, earthly life: life, life, life! Jesus is the promise of living. The Yes of God is the promise of living. And when we're on that bed surrounded by people who love us Jesus will say, "Today you will be with me in paradise." And we'll answer, "Jesus, even living in a filthy shack would be paradise if only you are there with me." Because Jesus is the Yes that is the Promise of Living.

And who gets to decide what these promises are about? Well, promises are about God, to be sure, but as soon as we say that, we have to add that God quickly turns it around and asks, "What do you want?" In other words, that we get to decide what the promises of living are about. Because the Yes is a Yes to us, we get to decide what to ask for. We might say, God, I love worship, and here we are worshipping. We might say, God, I love children—little infants with their cute little hands and their cute little mouths—and God will put children in our lives. Okay, maybe not our own infants, for most of us in this congregation. But ask, and God will put them in our lives: grandchildren, great-grandchildren, neighborhood children, even a child in a stroller at Safeway. And that will be enough.

We might say, God, I love music, I love art, I love beautiful china and crystal and splendid books—and we can walk up and down Commercial Avenue and see fine art and fine china and we can go to the library and check out splendid books and CDs full of music in such variety and abundance that princes and kings from not that long ago, if they knew, would be filled with envy, despite their riches. You can turn on a radio and listen a Mozart symphony—some of the most beautiful music ever written, played by the greatest orchestras in history—and you can listen to it with virtually no effort, in your own home.

Or you might say, God, I love love, bring me love, and God will bring you people to love and to be loved by: people in this congregation and in your family and in this community.

When David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had Bathsheba's husband murdered, God punished him because it was sin. But God told him, if you wanted more, why didn't you ask me for it? I wouldn't have given you Bathsheba, but I would have given you more abundance, even though you had all Israel and Judah. Because the Yes of God is the Promise of Living. And to accumulate these promises and these yeses—that's what it means to be rich toward God. Rich in living and rich in gratitude.

So, let's bring this home. What do we do? First, let's pay just a little bit of attention to the fourth commandment and not be so busy on Sundays. It's not so much about not working as it is resting. The Puritans advised that we see Sunday as the market day for the soul—just as at the Saturday market we get the bread and cheese and nectarines we need; so on Sunday we get the things that our souls need. Worship. Eucharist. Activities that bring life to us. The Word. Prayer. A good meal. Good friends.

Finally, ask. Practice asking. Cultivate the art of asking. Become a *really good* asker. The health and wealth gospel people aren't as wrong as we think. They're onto something. But it's not about money or physical well-being. It's about working without busyness, about knowing our soul and giving our soul what it needs, and it's about becoming a really good asker, an asker of the One who said, "Because I live, they also will live."