

WHAT MUST I DO? Sermon 10/13/24

Do you want to BE something or do you want to DO something? This is a question that a Spiritual Director may direct to you.

I wonder what this question brings up for you in your life today. How would you answer it? What matters more to you—being something or doing something?

That appears to be the unspoken question at the heart of Jesus' conversation with the man in today's gospel (Mark 10:17-31). It holds before us the tension between being and doing, between meaning and purpose. It's probably one of the unspoken questions in each of our lives that needs to be spoken more directly and more often. If we don't ask it for ourselves at some point, the circumstances of our lives will force us to face our options/answers.

In our lesson today, Jesus is speaking to the rich young man. The young man wanted to be sure that he would get eternal life so he asked what he could do. He was a person who felt that he had never broken any of the "laws," but Jesus challenged him to sell everything that he had and give the money to the poor.

The rich young man could be any of us...he felt that he had accomplished much in his life. He had power, position, prestige, possessions, and wealth. He'd done something with his life. And yet he knows that something is missing. He wants to know, "What must I do to inherit eternal life? It's not a question about getting to heaven. It's about meaning. It's about being something. It's about quality of life.

He's right in asking the question, but he's asking the wrong question. He wants to know what he must do, as if the life he wants is something to be acquired, possessed, and gained by expenditure. He's seeking the missing piece of his life by the only means he knows. But the life he wants, and the life I think you want is not about doing and purpose, it's about being and meaning. It's not outside us; it's already within us.

David Steindl-Rast in, *THE WAY OF SILENCE*, suggests that we've become so preoccupied with purpose and doing something that we've lost or forgotten about meaning and being something. Are we confusing meaning and purpose? Is the meaning of your life and my life only what we've accomplished? Most obituaries would say yes. We tend to mark and measure our lives by what we've done, but is that really the sum of who you and I are? Don't you want to be more than what you've done. I would like my life to matter not because of what I do but because of

who I am. Perhaps that is why the man in today's gospel goes to Jesus with his question.

Jesus responds to the man by saying, **you lack one thing.** Imagine us taking a quick inventory of our lives, accomplishments, and possessions and trying to figure out the one thing what we should do or get next.

Holy Scripture speaks on the "one thing" in several places:

- Jesus told Martha "There is need of only one thing...you are worried and distracted by many things" Her life was divided; she was here and there but not really anywhere; she needed to pay attention to what really matters
- Religious authorities questioned the man blind from birth; ..."though I was blind, now I see." He could now see with new eyes, gaining a deeper insight, living with a new level of consciousness, and awakening to the life that is before us.
- St. Paul says that when he and Barnabas and Titus met the leadership in Jerusalem, "The leadership asked only one thing; that we remember the poor." Maybe the "one thing" is compassion, caring for each other, and recognizing that our lives are one body in Christ.

Our liturgy today speaks to our "Doing Something"...it is also Access Sunday and Disabilities Awareness Week. We have been experiencing ways of dealing with Radical Resilience these past few weeks. When we observe how people have overcome so many personal challenges, we can easily identify with and understand how Radical Resilience played a part in their adaptability. I spent 15 years of my professional life as a Special Education and Special Needs Coordinator. Additionally I spent 23 years taking care of individuals with "needs" within my family.

A disability is any condition of the body or mind that limits a person's ability to do certain activities and interact with the world around them.

The 2022 statistics show that 70 million adults in the US deal with some type of disability; over 3 million children under the age of 18 deal with some type of disability (2019 statistics). Kay Boughner shared a quote from Brianna's cross country coach: "Each member of the team in some way is disabled...even those who appear gifted. Disabilities aren't always visible." That statement hits home for many of us...

Some people, hopefully none of you present this morning, have the mistaken idea that as long as no one in their family has a disability; as long as no one in their local church congregation has a disability; that they have no need to be concerned with disability ministry. The truth is that the group known as people with disabilities is the only group that anyone can join at any time! Just because you are not a member today does not mean that you won't be a member tomorrow.

We “see” people with disabilities every day of our lives. How we “see” them is sometimes the question that we need to address during this National Awareness time of recognizing people with disabilities. Are you the individual who upon seeing someone in a wheelchair in the store goes out of the way to avoid that person by slipping into another aisle so you don’t have to confront him/her? Are you one who talks with disabled people, but never make eye contact with them? Are you the one when you see individuals mumbling to themselves in a group setting walk away from or avoid the person? Are you the one who shy away from hugs and personal contact with people who are struggling to communicate with you? Are you the one who hesitates to call or contact people who are care-givers for others? Are you the one too busy to sit and listen to those who need to share their stories? Are you one who treats disabled persons as if they are “invisible?” And the list goes on...

- Now think about Jesus’ ministry. One of the major aspects of His ministry was His interaction and outreach to people with disabilities. Time and again, He offered invitations for the blind, lame, diseased and deaf to enter the kingdom of God.

When Bartimaeus was crying out for Jesus to have mercy upon him, many charged him that he should hold his peace. They recognized his disability—they saw that he was blind—yet they told him to be quiet and not to interrupt or trouble the Master.

Is this how we “do” things? How do we acknowledge those in our society who are in today’s definition “DISABLED?” Are we in our society not guilty of the same and, perhaps, even worse in our acknowledgement and reactions to those around us who need our love, understanding, compassion, and support. And when we give support, is it out of caring or only for an award or recognition?

PERSONAL EXAMPLES

As a Special Education and Special Needs Coordinator I worked with parents, teachers, students, para-professionals, Intermediate School District specialists, nurses, psychologists, advocates, court workers, and professionals within the community to meet the needs of Disabled Young People

We programmed for each individual’s needs. I experienced such amazing programming when all of the people involved with one child got together and focused on what needed to be done to help this child adapt, adjust, and accomplish each goal that would lead to a productive, safe, healthy, and happy life.

For some students, the support was relatively simple...we offered support , for instance, with learning disabled students. This identification means that the student has an average or above average IQ but must supplement his/her learning in various

ways; we utilized specialized learning centers, worked with teachers to present materials in varying ways, utilized para-professionals to work one on one with students....whatever it took.

One example that I'd like to share with you concerns a young man who was very bright but could not be taught to read beyond a certain grade level. His parents were so supportive of all of our efforts and this young man worked very hard to succeed. He was one of Rod Anderson's students...and Rod was so patient and understanding with his needs. When this young man walked across the stage to get his diploma, the WHOLE student class stood up and applauded him! Wow! Talk about bringing tears to your eyes. These peers did not shame him when he had to leave the room and take the tests in the learning center; when he needed additional support within the classroom....they recognized and applauded his massive efforts to succeed. I had taken this young man and his parents to Ferris to look at the diesel school there. I just learned within the last couple of years that Ferris University, for the first time ever, put his books on tape for him so he could succeed. It's stories like these, all of the actions of others, who exemplify what it means to support a person in need. It's also examples like these and random acts of kindness that you see others exhibiting around you, that are examples of how it means to be supportive in today's society.

Four of our past members, Rod Anderson, Don Crandall, Mike Wakefield, Tagg Tripp, and one current member, Kay Boughner....worked with students in wheelchairs and multiple handicaps....they did unimaginable supportive things to make students adapt and learn to keeping their wheelchairs moving, to building special adaptive equipment, to offering one-on-one support so their students could learn.

I so admired the parents of legally blind and deaf students who were able to "step back" and let us send their kids away for specialized training...imagine your child from Gaylord going downstate to learn how to navigate traffic with a cane in Kalamazoo?????!!! It takes strength and courage to be a parent or supporter of a disabled individual. But actions must be taken for results to occur.

Vocationally we use to train students for job placements and at that time were able to actually have job coaches and were able to supply adaptive equipment for students for their individual needs. I still see many of my "old" students working around Gaylord....what a blessing this community has been to listening to the needs of our people and stepping up to the task of offering support.

At the time that I was working, we dealt with mentally ill children in varying ways. We had our resource centers and in some cases we had to program for students at home because of their individual needs. Kay Boughner shared with me that at one time she was serving 70 young pre-schoolers at home to help get them ready for

school, and some of these needed additional help other than Head Start. Today we have Head Start and other supports that can be accessed for young people, but the challenges continue and I'm glad to see that our schools are adapting to these needs in various ways. But there is so much to be done.

As I stated earlier, we are all just a "step" away from facing some kind of disability ourselves. We hear often of physical and mental challenges that are keeping our loved ones from being able to live alone and care for themselves. I am heartbroken by the many who are caring for loved ones at home who are suffering with some type of dementia; this is so challenging for not only the ones who suffer, but especially those challenged with their care. November is Alzheimer's Awareness Month; 5.4 million Americans are living with this today supported by 15 million unpaid caregivers. The annual cost of Alzheimers today is \$183 billion; by mid-century this disease alone could cost this country over a trillion dollars a year.

We all have family and Friends who are shut in either in their homes or nursing facilities of some type. What are we doing to offer support to them. It doesn't take much effort to reach out to the many people who need to know that we care for them. Every time I try to come up with an excuse for not taking the time to visit someone then I say to myself: What if that were you and no one cared? A valuable lesson that I learned in my Stephen Ministry training is that when visiting people, you are not there as a problem solver...you can help them seek options, but do not feel that you should or could help them solve their individual needs.

So, we know: "It takes a village...." But what are some of the things that we can DO.

Our ministry for our disabled people perhaps should be simply:

- acknowledge them
- show them respect
- encourage them
- love them
- welcome them
- value them
- change our "attitudes" and take down "attitudinal barriers"
- listen

Additional notes: May mention.....

George Washington had a learning disability. He could barely write and had terrible spelling and grammar skills.

Dr. Samuel Johnson had Tourette's Syndrome yet he wrote A Dictionary of the English Language in 1747

John Milton was a writer who became blind at the age of 43; seven years after he became blind, he wrote Paradise Lost by dictating his words to his daughters

Pythagoras had epilepsy but still came up with the Pythagorean Theory

I'd like to close with a PRAYER FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES:

taken from the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Angelo

Lord Our God, you make every person in your divine image.

You know our needs and you fulfill our desires.

You protect us when we are fragile and give us courage for each new day.

Help us to understand the power and wisdom of human vulnerability.

Open our hearts to accept our weakness in your strength.

Give us the courage to break down the barriers that separate us from one another.

Enable us to reach out lovingly to all your children, so that, together, we may all participate fully in parish life and worship.

Make us grateful for the talents and abilities that all people can share with the Church.

Guide our actions to create truly welcoming communities that are open to the gifts of each individual, celebrating our interdependence with respect for all life.

Help us to appreciate all those, living with disabilities, who contribute their time and talents, even in the face of obstacles or misunderstanding.

We look to the future with optimism and with faith in you, as we pursue our call to provide justice and fullness of life for all people with disabilities.

We pray that every man, woman, and child may develop their potential.

We offer you these prayers as one flock, following the same shepherd, Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen