

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Wisdom 7:7-11 and Mark 10:17-30

Jews recently celebrated Sukkot. They built huts in their yards and then ate and lived in the huts as a reminder of the forty years the ancient Israelites lived in the desert. Rabbi Avi Shafran notes, "There is something surprising, even jarring, about sitting in a small rudimentary hut, within sight of one's more comfortable, more spacious home."¹ He continues, "What the sukkah allows those within it to perceive, if they are honest enough to not push the thought away, is that our homes and possessions are not what matter in our lives... They come to know that accumulation of stuff is folly. What we own does not define us." He wryly concludes, "Odd as it may seem, that thought is a joyous one."

Consider children: they do not spend their days pursuing a paycheck or planning retirement portfolios. Rather, they take joy in Cheerios on their tiny fingertips, reading a bedtime story in the arms of someone who loves them and blowing bubbles into the wind. That their joy has nothing to do with possessions is another reason Jesus said, "Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." That saying sits between a very grown-up discussion of divorce and this week's equally serious discussion of the role possessions play in our spiritual lives. So out of place! Or is it?

When the author of Wisdom declares he prefers wisdom to gems, gold and silver, we smile painfully. We believe it is an unrealistic view and live that belief. We squirrel away money for retirement. We admire the wealthy. We encourage our kids to choose careers that bring financial security. We tell each other our economy is healthy only if we are spending more each year.

But the exhaustion of the rat race and the endless comparing of your stuff with mine take us far from the joy of Sukkot or of children – a point Jesus highlights in this week's gospel. When asked, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life," he gives a strange answer, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." Jesus' question reveals that there is already something wrong in the approach, something easy to miss. Only God is good. Anything good, including eternal life, including Jesus, comes from the only source of goodness there is, God. Since goodness is all around us, willy-nilly, goodness is pure gift. After all, inheritances are bestowed out of love and kinship; they are not earned. God gives good things to those whom God loves and God loves everyone, regardless of what they do or who they are, simply because that is God. Period. So receive the gift like a child and delight in it. It is that simple.

Yet, we adults complicate it and in doing so subtly let sin enter. Surely, we have to have some control over this situation. Surely, we can take an active role in accumulating some of this goodness and deciding what goodness is. Possessions! They will be our guidepost, our assurance. And poof! We cut ourselves off from Jesus, eternal life and God's kingdom. Jesus says, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom." He does not say it *can be* hard but it *is* hard². So again we ask, "What can we do to inherit eternal life?" Nothing: Jesus says, "For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God." Childlike receptivity to the pure gift of God's love is all that is required. Accept the goodness God offers. Let go of fussing over things. Let go of things. Receive the joy of God's goodness. Believe "It is heaven itself to take what is given./ to see what is plain; what the sun/ lights up willingly."³

- ❖ What brings you joy? Do that and thank God for the gift of joy.
- ❖ Give yourself time to be in nature. Just notice what you see. What does it reveal about your life?

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¹ Avi Shafran. "[Sukkot Is the Jewish Holiday That Teaches Us the Joys of Living Without.](#)" Religious News Service.

² Elizabeth Nagel. *Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers and Proclaimers of the Word 2021*. LTP, p. 268.

³ Mary Oliver. "Daisies." *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver*. Penguin Books, 2017, p. 176.