

I'll be honest with you, I heard her say, I hate asking for help. I always have. I seem to have learned at an early age that self-sufficiency is one of the highest virtues. Being independent, reliable, able to see your own way through a problem, and unfailingly putting one foot in front of the other has been a core value of mine my entire life.

I suppose self-sufficiency is my golden calf. I would much rather physically exhaust myself and deplete my soul than ask anyone for help.

The young man asks Jesus in this morning's Gospel "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus' responds to the young man's inquiry by including a cursory review of the 10 commandments. Jesus clearly holds the 10 Commandments in very high regard and understands them to be fundamental building blocks of right relationship with God and neighbor. And he lists off the commandments relating to how individuals should behave with and among one another. However, of interest to me is what Jesus **doesn't** mention.

Since the young man was a keeper of the commandments, the unmentioned 'thou shalt nots' would be a glaring oversight on Jesus' part, and as such, would stand out in this young man's mind and grab his attention.

The words 'you will have no other gods before me' must have been deafening by their omission.

My friend continued, *It should come as no surprise that I've been called a lot of names thanks to my need to stand on my own two feet. Stubborn. A martyr. Arrogant. Self-righteous. Holier-than-thou. And If I can stand on my own two feet ... even if it is an unnecessary hardship, I should. I'm okay with all that, because I know, in that deep down place within myself, that I can only cry wolf so many times. I think to myself, 'if I enlist help now, my people might be less inclined to help the next time I need them ~ and my need might very well be even greater at that point. What then?'*

The selective mention of the commandments jars his listener to realize that we cannot earn eternal life through any merit of our own. Jesus is forcing the man, and us, to consider the priorities of our hearts, not our to-do lists.

“Jesus,” the man says, “I’ve been faithful and have kept the commandments since I was a boy.” The unspoken question hangs in the air: ‘After all I’ve done, all I’ve tried to do, am I really still falling short?’

Don't even get me started on unsolicited advice, she said. Whenever I hear the words "you should get this..." or "you should do that...", I shut down. And I can pretty much guarantee you that whatever I decide to do will not be whatever was advised. Out of sheer principle. Because when I get a load of 'should' dumped on me, all I can hear is that person's belief that I can't do it on my own ~ that I'm not smart enough to figure the problem out my own way, that I'm not strong enough to maneuver the weight of the burden under my own steam, that I'm not living up to their expectation of who I'm supposed to be or how I'm supposed to be. I don't like feeling like I'm responsible for managing their expectations ~ I have a hard enough time living up to my own.

What is Jesus’ response? He looks at the man, he really looks at him – he **sees** the man for all that he is and all he has become, and **loves** him.

We understand and value ourselves differently than Jesus does. Perhaps some of us define our identity by our material success or by our intellect or by our community activism or by our social network. Many of us have our self-value wrapped up in something other than our relationship with God, and Jesus sees that. He **sees** us as we are. And by the grace of God, we are **loved** as we are.

All of us have so much to be grateful for: we are assured retirement income from social security, pension plans and 401ks; we have relatively easy access to quality medical care; we proudly display diplomas on our walls; we are dressed in clean clothes; we eat whatever we want, as much as we want, whenever we want; we are cool in the summer and warm in the winter; those of us in this room who want employment can find employment and we don’t have to worry about how we’re going to get from our homes to our jobs and back again. Our problems are all first world problems.

We are the Firsts. And our culture reinforces in countless ways that that is the place we want to be – on top, number one, that being a first is something to be

proud of. We're taught that pride itself is to be valued. But Jesus says no. When we allow ourselves to think and behave and vote and buy and accumulate as Firsts, we still lack that one thing Jesus hopes we'll grab ahold of.

My friend continued, I have a photo of one of my kids when they're right smack in the middle of having an existential crisis. We were getting our jackets and shoes on to go to story time at the library, and my very independent 2 year old is putting on their little jean jacket. One arm is in, and the other is stuck. I offer to help, but that only makes things worse. "I can do it!" they shout. Tears start. I back off and lay on the carpet, doing my best to be patient and allow this sweet cherub to figure out how to solve their own problem. Yet the arm is no less stuck despite how hard they try to push it through. Tears become sobs. Sobs become wails.

"You lack one thing." Jesus doesn't angrily dress the man down because he hasn't kept his priorities straight ~ of course the rich man loves his wealth, his power, his prestige, and it's natural that he's unwilling to give it up. And Jesus doesn't condemn the man for loving earthly things more than divine things. He simply and straightforwardly says ~ by speaking Truth in love ~ that the man should give up that which has usurped God's place in his life.

(pause) And when he heard this, we are told, the man walks away, grieving.

He grieves because he is faced with having to relinquish his power. To live fully as a child of God, Jesus tells him, he must surrender not just his financial security and material assets, but his self-determination ... his place in society, which of course is tied up in his pride and self-understanding. He must relinquish control, give up the temporal to gain the eternal.

In a fit of frustration, the arm finally is pushed through ~ at which time my child discovers that something still isn't right. The jacket on upside down and it will need to be taken off again.

Control is such a human thing to want. Being in control makes you *feel* like you know your place, you know your value, you know who you are. Right? But the thing about control is that it's not real ~ it's an illusion. We want to believe that when we're in control, we'll have no more worries, we'll hunger

for nothing, and that we'll *have it all* in the palm of our hand. But that's not how it works. None of us are truly in control.

We see it right here with the rich young man: he has just run up to Jesus and knelt before him – the actions of a man who is clearly spiritually hungry and aching for that *something* that he knows is missing in his life, despite the fact that he has everything a man of his day could ever possibly want. Despite his best efforts to check off the each of the 10 commandments on his daily checklist while amassing a fortune and securing his comfort, he is still not in control of his destiny.

The prospect of leaving all that behind grieves him deeply.

The one who ran eagerly to Jesus now turns his back and walks away, so far unwilling to relinquish “living the good life” so that he can live **THE** good, everlasting Life.

As I lay there on the carpet, I snap a photo of this moment with the upside-down jean jacket. The angle of the photo distorts my child's size – looking up from the floor, they appear so much bigger than their tiny toddler self ~ their distress so much more monumental than a simple donning of a jacket

My friend reflects, This photo is a metaphor for my need to be self-sufficient. My need to be in control of my own circumstances. I've endured many upside-down jackets in my life simply because I tend to get too wrapped up in my 'I can do it!' attitude to be willing to admit I might benefit from a helping hand from time to time. Usually I am able to calmly get my jacket on right-way-up first try without any assistance, but some days? Well, some days my independent streak causes me to get in my own way. And I do it to myself.

How might our relationship with God shift or change if we handed over those things that are most precious to us? Our pride, our jealousy, our status, our judgmentalism, our need for affirmation, perhaps even our money?

Jesus says 'go, sell, give, come.' Go take care of what you need to take care of: divest yourself of those things that get in your way and relinquish control over what holds you to a life that does not honor God's place at the center, give your power and prestige and status and wealth to those who do not enjoy the benefits of such. Only then, Jesus says, are you truly able to come and follow me.