

1 Sermon, May 12, 2013

Texts: Matthew 9:9-13, Luke 5:1-11

Title: "The Bible in Song: The Things We Leave Behind"

Play Michael Card's song

CNN – February 23, 2013

According to CNN, in February of this year, Sarah Darling of Kansas City, Missouri, gave away her ring. By accident.

She almost never takes it off, but it was giving her a bit of a rash so she did, zipping it in her coin purse for safe-keeping.

Later, she absentmindedly emptied the contents of that purse into the collection cup of Billy Ray Harris, who is homeless and often stays under a bridge in Darling's hometown.

It wasn't until the next day that she realized her ring was gone.

"It was horrible. It was such a feeling of loss," Darling said. "It meant so much to me beyond just the financial value."

She went back to look for Harris, but he was gone. She returned the next day and found him.

"I asked him ... 'I don't know if you remember me, but I think I gave you something that's very precious to me,' and he says, 'Was it a ring? Yeah, I have it, I kept it for you,'" Darling said.

When the story came out, well-wishers from around the world sent money to Billy Ray Harris, that homeless man. They did it through an online fundraiser set up by Sarah Darling, whose ring was returned.

Sarah Darling's husband met with Billy Ray Harris to tell him about the flood of donations and to get to know him better. They went together to make some repairs to Harris' bike.

When CNN affiliate KCTV caught up with Harris they asked him how he felt about all the attention he's attracted since returning the ring.

"I like it, but I don't think I deserve it," he said.

"What I actually feel like is, 'what has the world come to when a person who returns something that doesn't belong to him and all this happens?'" Harris said.

Pause.

2 Sermon, May 12, 2013

We are often attached to our stuff. The panic that Sarah Darling had when she discovered that she no longer had the ring shows how attached we can get to our stuff.

The simple response that Billy Ray Harris showed when he gave back the ring shows us the peace we can have when stuff doesn't have so much control over us.

Michael Card's song tells us the story of how some people left everything to follow Jesus. It's a part of the gospel message we don't often focus on.

Simon Peter left a small business to follow Jesus. Matthew left a secure government job to follow Jesus.

The idea of the song is that we are enriched by what we leave behind. Michael Card is not talking about leaving a legacy when we die, although that certainly is one way to enrich the world. Certainly the moneys that have been left to the church have enabled us to do ministry we otherwise could not have.

Certainly Bill Gates has had a huge impact on the world, as Bill Gates has turned from making money to giving it away to improve global health and agriculture.

But that's not mostly what the song is about. It is about freedom. When we let go of our control, God can do great things.

Let go, and let God.
That's a pretty good summary of the good news.
Let go, and let God.

If we're in charge, God can't do as much through us. And the way we are in charge is often through money. How often do we ask God how we should use our money?

If we ask God how we should use our money, we may come up with very different answers that if we just pay attention to our own desires.

That's why there is a long Christian tradition of renunciation, fasting, abstinence, and monastic living. But we don't have to be a monk or nun to practice letting go and letting God.

3 Sermon, May 12, 2013

It's Mothers Day today.

What does a mother want more than her child's success? Different mothers define success in different ways. Some might say success is being a lawyer or doctor. Others would say it's being honest and caring.

Regardless of what a mother defines as success, most mothers are willing to sacrifice a huge amount for their child's success.

To do that, mothers leave a lot of their own desires and will behind. They often give up on dreams and hopes and even health for their children. And they do it gladly. If their child turns out to be OK, everything is worth it.

At the end, mothers need to let go of their children. Let go, and let God direct and take care of them.

Mothers entrust their children to God with lots of prayer.

And there is a freedom when we can really let our children go – to their own families often, and to their own callings.

Let go and let God.

When we let go of our possessions, it means we need to trust God more.

But there's something else, too. The more we let go of our stuff, the more we need community – the more we need a network of other people with whom we are in relationship.

That's what happened to Simon Peter and to Matthew. They let go of their possessions, but became part of a community of people who were following Jesus. They were surrounded by love and support.

A man I know visited Cuba a few years back. He noticed how poor the people were. But every evening, the streets were filled with neighbors sharing food and conversation. There was a lot of joy.

Here in the US, it's a lot easier to get stuck behind a screen – a television or computer or gaming console – and not know your neighbor. It's a lot easier to get isolated behind our stuff.

What if we were, instead, to turn off the screens, and invite our neighbors over for supper, and get to know them? What if we were to find more ways to share with other people – share hopes and dreams, share stories, and even share lawn and garden tools?

4 Sermon, May 12, 2013

I'm not suggesting we all become like the Amish.

But maybe we need to remind ourselves that, as much fun as a new smartphone or ipad or the shopping channel can be, it can never be as meaningful as a real flesh-and-blood neighbor.

Jesus told us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.
Do you think maybe he was onto something?

There sits Simon so foolishly wise Proudly he's tending his nets
Then Jesus calls and the boats drift away And all that he owns he forgets
But more than the nets he abandoned that day
He found that his pride was soon drifting away
And it's hard to imagine the freedom we find
From the things we leave behind

Matthew was mindful of taking the tax And pressing the people to pay
But hearing the call he responded in faith
And followed the Light and the Way
And leaving the people so puzzled he found
The greed in his heart was no longer around
And it's hard to imagine the freedom we find
From the things we leave behind

Every heart needs to be set free From possessions that hold us so tight
'Cause freedom's not found in the things that we own
It's the power to do what is right

With Jesus, our only possession Then giving becomes our delight
And we can't imagine the freedom we find
From the things we leave behind

We show a love for the world in our lives By worshipping goods we possess
When Jesus says, "Lay all your treasures aside
And love God above all the rest."
'Cause when we say no to the things of the world
We open our hearts to the love of the Lord
And it's hard to imagine the freedom we find
From the things we leave behind

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