“Not Complicated, Just Hard”
August 16, 2026

“Children, how hard it is to enter the realm of God!” – Mark 10:24

I don’t know if we have Charles Schulz and his cartoon character Linus to thank for introducing the term “security blanket” into our lexicon as we commonly use the term today, but we certainly can thank Charles and Linus for popularizing the term if not necessarily the concept.

We cling to things because we want security. We seek security because we want our lives to matter. Jesus tells us that neither security nor significance can finally be possessed. They are found by receiving God’s love—and then giving ourselves away.

The story of the rich young man that is our second lesson this morning is not, in the first place, about money. We think it is, of course, because he’s got it, Jesus tells him he needs to part with it, and he can’t do it, so we think that money’s the problem.

But the money in this story is a symptom, not the cause.

The real problem is about security and the security that this young man thinks money can buy him.

He doesn't come to Jesus because his life is falling apart. He comes because his life is remarkably successful—and somehow still insufficient. He has almost everything the world tells him should make a person content, and he knows that something is missing.

He has security. What he’s seeking is salvation.

“Good teacher,” he asks Jesus, “what must I do to be saved?”

Jesus doesn't tell him, “You have too much money.”

Jesus looks at him, loves him, and then identifies the thing between the life this man’s living and the life he longs for.

Jesus isn’t punishing him. Jesus loves him enough to tell him the truth.

This man’s wealth has certainly provided for him. But it doesn’t seem to have reached the core of his needs. He’s seeking something deeper, more meaningful, and more lasting. He’s seeking not another “what,” but a “why.”

The Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ says that God seeks in holy love "to save all people from aimlessness and sin."

The church has tended to oversimplify its theology by focusing on the sin part, but for most of us, I suspect, and probably for the individual in our lesson, it's aimlessness that poses the greater problem.

And in a materialistic culture such as ours, we try to use things to answer questions that things were never designed to answer.

What will make me safe?
What will make me significant?
What will make my life matter?
What will make me happy?

And no house, no bank account, no job, no political movement, no achievement, no possession has ever been able to answer those questions for us.

It's an old spiritual malady. The prophet Isaiah sang about it in our first lesson.

"Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?"

We don't know the specifics, but we do know the problem: that perennial attempt to alleviate spiritual impoverishment with material stuff. We've been trying to do that since our cave-dwelling days and even after all this time, we still don't see the futility of the attempt.

A few months back, a good handful of us went to hear the lawyer and social justice activist Bryan Stevenson. One of Stevenson's most insightful observations is that the answer to poverty is not wealth; the answer to poverty is justice. Establish a just society and everyone benefits, especially poor people.

And establishing justice is a spiritual undertaking.

"But you must return to your God," the prophet Hosea said. "Maintain love and justice, and wait for your God, always" (Hosea 12:6).

And security is not the same thing as justice.

The world tells us to secure ourselves.
Jesus tells us to give ourselves.

And Christianity isn't simply about finding one's purpose as an individual. It is about finding one's purpose in relation to God and neighbor.

That's what Jesus was telling that young man in our gospel reading: to direct his life away from his earthly security and toward his divine calling. And that's where he'd find his security. That's where he'd find his sense of purpose. That's where he'd find the strength to follow the One for Others – indeed, to become a One for Others.

God does not ask us to become Jesus. God asks us to become more fully the people God created us to be—and to place our lives in God's hands so that **God** and not the world can shape, direct, and use them.

And there we discover something the world cannot sell us: a life with meaning.

Living for God, which is what Christianity and all the great religions come down to, is not complicated; it's just hard.

We make Christianity complicated the way W. C. Fields is supposed to have done when a minister found him on his deathbed flipping madly through a Bible.

"What are you looking for?" the minister asked.

"Loopholes," the comedian is supposed to have replied.

It's hard to resist the claims of a world promising to save us in this way or that. It's hard to think upstream of problems. It's hard to resist the go-along-to-get-along mentality that passes for keeping the peace when there is no peace for any except the privileged.

But it can be done. That's the promise of the Word of God enshrined in Scripture, the Word made flesh in Jesus, the Word treasured by communities of the faithful, and the Word that speaks in every raindrop and every blade of grass for those with the ears to hear and the eyes to see.

Christianity isn't complicated. It's surprisingly clear.

Love God.

Love your neighbor.

Give yourself away.

Follow Jesus.

And here's the hard part:

Resist the things that ask you to make an idol of your own security and your own sense of self.

Let God, and not the world, make you you.

It's not complicated, it's just hard.

We conclude our service with the first two verses of hymn 546, "Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing."