

Several weeks ago, I had the day off and was going to run a few errands...  
so pulling out of my street,  
I needed to take a right hand turn towards my first stop...  
the trouble was...I took a left hand turn towards the Center...and  
the worst part about it:  
I didn't even realize what I had done for a couple of blocks!

Finally.. I recognized that I had taken a wrong turn...  
I started to laugh at myself.  
Talk about mindlessness!  
Acting out of pure habit I was  
heading in a direction I did not want to go!

Have you ever done that???

Our habits, my habits, are so ingrained, so unconscious and  
so strong that unless --or until-- we pay attention,  
it is our habits that direct our lives and we find ourselves living a life,  
going in a direction we very well might not want to go!

When we live our lives on auto-pilot  
making decisions, unconsciously, frantically, without reflection...  
often times we find our self in a job we don't want  
or a relationship that isn't healthy.

It is often so easy to let everyone else and everything else direct the course of our lives...It is  
often *so* easy to go with the crowd, to get sucked up in the hype, to be smitten with all the  
glitz and the advertising  
and to lose our way from what we hold to be true and real and of value...  
So what are we to do??

**This is where our Gospel reading comes in....  
and, even as parables go...this is a tougher one...**

**Now, you need to know that merchants were not respected or admired.  
People in Jesus' day generally thought of them as conniving and dishonest.  
Also, to sell everything is dramatic for sure but hugely impractical...  
Why sell everything? Why sell your home, your wife, your children, your clothes, all of  
your source of income for something that cannot be eaten,  
that will not provide shelter, that has actually no value for sustaining life?**

**What in the world is Jesus saying???**

**Although the reading says his listeners understood him,  
I think most of us haven't!**

**Now remember this a parable, a teaching story...**

**Jesus is deliberately trying to mess with our normal, rational, logical  
way of thinking, living and loving.**

**Some scholars suggest the reason the Kingdom of Heaven is compared to the merchant is  
because Jesus is challenging us to broaden our judgment of  
who's good and whose bad...whose saved and whose not...whose wise and whose foolish...**

**Remember Jesus isn't trying to affirm what we already know,  
he's trying to expand our awareness, enlarge our hearts and  
raise our consciousness.**

**They suggest that he could be saying,**

**“If even a sleazy, dishonest merchant knows a treasure when he sees it and becomes single  
focused in his pursuit to acquire it...**

**Well, then, Jesus says to the crowds *and to us*:**

**How focused are you, how passionate are you seeking what you value....**

**Do you even know what you are looking for? what you value?**

**And once you find it, how much are you willing to let go of? to sell?**

**in order that to obtain what you say you care about?**

**So, of course the first question must be:**

**is What is the treasure that we seek?**

**WHAT do we hold to be of ultimate value?**

**Now...I suspect each of us, if asked that question,**

**could respond with a whole list of noble values**

**grand and eloquent statements:**

**I value my family, I care deeply for Earth,**

**I value love, kindness, joy...**

**yet often times when we look at our calendars and our checkbooks....**

**we find ourselves swept up in unconscious habits**

**which take us far away from what we hold dear...**

**If this is true for us, the next question is:**

**what are we willing to let go of, to sell off**

**so that we might live, might obtain what we profess to be of greatest value?**

**Jesus constantly taught that the Kingdom of heaven was characterized by justice, forgiveness, mercy, joy, compassion, abundance and celebration...**

**If we say that we are followers of the Christ**

**do our daily lives reflect those values?**

**Do our choices how we make a living,**

**who and what we talk about in the office lunchroom...**

**what we do for entertainment,**

**what text messages we send,**

**what pictures we post on face book**

**Do all these activities reflect the Kingdom of Heaven?**

**Does hope, peace and love find their way into my conversations with my family, friends and strangers on the street?**

**Is patience and gentleness made known by how I wait in line and how drive my car?**

**Is generosity part of my monthly budget?**

**Do I let the guy merge in front of me when LaGrange road narrows down to one lane and I've already been patiently waiting to get through the 131<sup>st</sup> street intersection?**

**I love the quote by Annie Dillard in our program today:**

**“How we spend our days, of course, is how we spend our lives.”**

**Often times we get caught up and distracted with tomorrow:**

**I will donate some money to the food pantry after I get the raise,**

**I will donate some time to animal shelter when I have more time...**

**I will be nicer tomorrow,**

**kinder tomorrow,**

**more patient tomorrow...**

**What Jesus is asking of all of us THIS day, this evening**

**is to be single focused and make known the Kingdom of heaven...NOW**

**Walk gently, speak kindly and love graciously NOW....**

**Be aware so that we will turn left when we want to turn left so that we go in the direction of our truth**

**Be mindful so that we will turn right when we want to turn right so that we go in the direction of our values and deeply held beliefs...**

**Be single focused....be alert....pay attention!**

**For the Kingdom of Heaven is here....NOW! AMEN.**