

The Wild Goose & the Rich Young Man
Mark 10
October 10, 2021*
St. Andrew's Waterford and Canterbury on the Lake
The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

May the God who....

Please be seated.

Good Morning!

So it turns out—

its not ours and it never will be.

And I'm sticking with that.

The rich young man-

--earnest, faithful, pragmatic.

He says to Jesus,

“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

What’s it gonna take for me to be saved?

Jesus replies—

“You know the deal

—keep the commandments—

don’t commit adultery, don’t steal,

don't lie, keep the Sabbath,

don't defraud,

honor your mother and your father.”

You can see it in his eye

how his intent stare relaxes—

and you can hear it in his voice—

the urgency abates—

Hey, hey the man is thinking

I may be okay with this.

“Good teacher I have done all of that

—since I was a child.

I have done just that.”

And you know he is smiling now—

shaking his head—

he doesn't have to hunt this one down.

He doesn't have to plot and plan,

practice and rehearse.

His wardrobe is fine—he's okay

—he's gonna inherit eternal life—

because it requires nothing more

than that which he's been doing all along...

.All of that knowledge

flies across the synapses of his brain

and endorphins of well-being

flood the capillaries of his heart.

He is flush—

he is good. And then...

And then....

Jesus says,

looking at him and loving him,

“There’s just one thing—

-go, sell what you own,

and give the money to the poor,

and you will have

treasure in heaven;

then come follow me.

Let it all go—give it away

—sell it at a loss—

give your money

to the fellow who stands on the Entrance to the Lodge

and then come and follow me.

Oh—his breath quickens,

his pupils dilate

—his skin gets a little clammy—

-But that's what I have

—but that's who I am—

it's how I know I'm okay...

Letting go of that—

is separating the marrow from the bone.

You can do it

—but you can't stand up after.

So being the pragmatist,

our man,

the one I bear the most resemblance to

of all the gospel characters—

our man—my man--your man—

turns and walks away.

Because that's just not gonna happen.

He's a pragmatist and what Jesus has just said

—not so practical—

metaphor maybe—

hyperbole perhaps—

poetic license—for sure.

But for real?

How will he survive?

How will he know who he is

if he doesn't have those things

that assure him that he matters?

Not that long ago

amidst my kayaking adventures

I did something different.

I branched out.

I got serious about learning to paddle a canoe.

Certainly I had suffered through

high school river trips

in ungainly, wallowing, aluminum workhorses.

Plodding down algae filled rivers.

But never had I been serious about a canoe.

But because the British Canoe Union

has now decreed

that people who teach kayaking

must also be proficient in canoeing

—I set aside some time to discern some of the basics.

A dear, dear friend of mine

who lives in the northern part of Michigan

is a fabulous canoeist.

So I called him—

and asked if he'd share some of his skills with me.

So for four wonderful days—a few summers ago

Dick came home early from work

and took me paddling every afternoon

for four or five hours.

We each were in our own canoe.

Solo—next to one another

Beautiful wooden wonders that he had built.

He taught me the j-stroke,

the c-stroke,

the Canadian, the Indian,

and a variety of prys and draws.

And eventually I could make my boat—go

forward—straight—

or turn—

paddling all on one side.

Quietly we would go around the lakes—

the zen of paddling—filling my body.

On our last day

we went up and down a narrow

slow moving river

with many bends and turns.

As we unloaded our boats

and carried them on our shoulders

to the rivers' edge

we saw a Canadian goose that looked to be ill.

It didn't move at all—

when we walked past it with the canoes.

But then when we pushed the boats into the stream

—the Goose honked, flapped its wings

and got in the river

right behind our boats.

Off we went

slowly paddling down the river,

around the corners—

into the Lilly pads.

I went into the Lilly pads—

Dick just went around the corners.

And the goose followed.

For an hour and a half the Goose followed.

Pausing when we paused—

waiting patiently—

when I needed to back up—

turn around and get out the weeds

—sitting behind me—

giving me a wide berth

in those instances—

because it was clear to both of us

that I was something of a menace on the water.

When we reached our mid-point—

as we paused to rest—

our Goose—

because I had come to think of it as ours

—treaded water in between the two of us

—duck-diving periodically

to catch a minnow passing by.

We turned around and headed back upstream—

and so did our Goose.

But this time—

it was paddling against the current—

and we were able to go faster than it was.

At one point we went around

the bend in the river—

out of its eyesight.

And it squawked and honked loudly—

flapped its wings—

flew over the bend—

and landed four feet behind us.

Shaking its bill—

as if to say—

“Hey—I couldn’t see you anymore.

Don’t get too far away!”

All the while Dick and I

kept marveling

because we’d never seen anything like this before.

For another hour and a half

it followed us back to the start.

Paddling along.

Always staying within four feet of us.

When we landed—

it climbed back up on shore

and resumed the perch it had

when we arrived.

Meanwhile I'd been thinking.

Dick has a farm

with a horse, a pony, a mule, goats, turkeys,

and more to the point 17 ducks.

I said,

“Dick we have to take it home with us.

That Goose likes us.

It needs us.

What’s it gonna do without us?

We have a towel in the truck—

I can wrap it and hold it in my lap.

And then it can be with the ducks in the pen.

It would be there—

we'd know where it was.”

Dick-

who is much smarter than me-

just said,

“Bonnie

I am not taking

a wild goose home in the cab of my truck.

If it wants to come visit

it can fly home behind us.”

Then it came to me.

In the Celtic tradition

the Holy Spirit is portrayed

not as a passive cooing dove—

but as a loud, honking, squawking wild goose.

Present in our lives,

following close by

but never ever under our control.

It was then—that it became clear

that I

and the Rich Young man—

have a lot in common.

Getting confused with what's mine—

what's God's.

What's in our control

and what's on loan.

What I think

I, perhaps you,

and the rich young man need to know

is

It's not ours—

it never was—

at its very best

it is on some long-term intergalactic loan.

We can't hold it,

trap it, pen it up or buy it.

Because it's not ours and it never was.

But God like that honking goose—

diligently paddling after us—

is there—and always will be.

That's it.

Until we meet the Goose

on its own terms

we will never fully comprehend

the beauty of this life

and our role in this world.

Paddle slowly take it all in—

be the reliable, gracious steward,

but don't try to take it home—

because its not ours

and it never will be...thanks be to God.

Amen.