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What Possesses Us?

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October 10, 2021, 20th Sunday after Pentecost

Thanksgiving

One of the blessings of this pandemic for our family has been the discovery of Schitt's Creek. We had of course heard everyone raving about it forever but never had time to watch it. Over the last few months the girls and John and I have been watching it together. We're not quite at the final episode, so no spoilers please!

Many of you have seen it already, so I don't need to go into a lot of detail about the premise. The Rose family, who we're told are very rich, loses its fortune and all its possessions (except their fancy clothes, somehow). The family is forced to move to the tiny rural town of Schitt's Creek. One of my favourite episodes is when the Rose family receives a surprise delivery of one of their former prized possessions. It's a portrait of their family. But it's huge. Life-sized. We learn that it had been stored for them by friends who had now sent it back to them. It's so huge that it doesn't fit in the motel room they live in. Eventually, they reluctantly decide that it can't stay. It needs to go in the trash. Nick's going to pull up a still of this scene for us.

I love this scene for many reasons. It's actually a microcosm of the Christian life. The Rose family members are taking a good hard look at themselves. They're assessing where they were, where they are, and where they're going. Their friend Stevie says to them: "you don't look very happy in this portrait". The family she has come to know in Schitt's Creek isn't the same family as the one staring back in the painting. And the Roses realize it too. The loss of riches has brought about a transformation. A transformation not only of lifestyle, but of fundamental values.

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." That's what Jesus says to the disciples after the man with many possessions comes looking to him for spiritual advice. Are they supposed to take him literally? Are we?



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Isn't it funny and fitting that this story turns up on Thanksgiving Sunday? In the lectionary we have a choice of readings for today. The ones we heard today are the continuation of the "regular" lectionary as we continue with Job, Hebrews and Mark. The Thanksgiving Gospel readings are different. We would have heard the Gospel from Matthew, where we're invited to consider the lilies and how they neither toil nor spin.

Secular Thanksgiving invites us into a mind space of gratitude for the things that we have. And yet, here Jesus is asking us to give them all away! Is that what he's really saying?

The Rose family's financial demise was forced. Their move to Schitt's Creek was not desired nor planned. And yet their downfall was a catalyst. A catalyst for friendship, love, sacrifice, trust, loyalty, creativity, courage and joy. Isn't this the Kingdom of God? (It's really an awesome show by the way, in case you can't tell how much I love it by now)

My question for us this morning is this, well one of my many questions for us, is: was it the losing of actual money and possessions that caused these breakthroughs for the Rose family? PAUSE. I'm not sure I can stand here and advocate for poverty. Especially when there are so many of us who are struggling right here, right now, on our lawn, on our block, in our city. Things are not good for many of us and our neighbours.

We know that "people living in poverty are more likely to face health-related setbacks, to have difficulty finding and keeping a job, [and] to find themselves in the criminal justice system."¹ I don't think this is what Jesus was getting at when he spoke about the Kingdom of God. So what is Jesus getting at here?

A very wise woman said something that really stuck with me this past week. She asked to remain anonymous. We were talking about this Bible story and she said: "I

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/poverty-reduction/reports/strategy.html#h2.4>



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don't think this story is so much about what we possess. I think it's more about what possesses us." Huh. Let's think about that.

When we think about the Rose family, was it the losing of actual money that caused the breakthroughs? Or was it that it was money that was the thing that possessed them?

Now you know where I'm going next, right? There's no avoiding it at this point. Here we go. What possesses us?

It might very well be money. It might be something else. It might be our desire for control. It might be a deep insecurity. It might be a highly competitive nature that needs us to be on top. It might be the need to always be right. It might be a toxic relationship telling us that we are small, insignificant. It might be excessive worrying preventing us from ever actually being in the here and now. It might be a stubborn refusal to ask for or accept help. It could be unresolved anger that won't let us go.

It could be any number of things that get in the way of better spiritual health. I was going to say get in the way of Kingdom living, but that sounds like a retirement residence, or even a cult, doesn't it? What possesses us might be any number of things that get in the way of better spiritual health. That's better. You know what I mean.

Fr. Richard Rohr has written a beautiful book called *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. In it, he talks about how in the first half of our life, we typically try and build up. Material possessions, relationships, careers, status, personalities, hobbies, habits. We collect things like a mama bird building her nest. These things make us feel good, comfortable, secure. At some point, Rohr says, we fall. Something happens to shake this foundation that we've carefully built. It can be an illness, an embarrassment, a failed relationship, something major.

At that point, he says, we have the opportunity to let go. To let go of the things that we carefully built in the first half of life. And if we're able to do that, he says, we'll experience what he calls "falling upward". That is, falling towards God, towards



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the divine, towards our creator. And this, he says, is a good thing. That it's a mark of maturity on our spiritual journey. This is what Jesus invited the man with many possessions to do that day. This is what he's inviting us to do today. I think the Roses of Schitt's Creek would approve. Amen.

Question for Open Space: Discuss how amazing the show Schitt's Creek is. JK. How do you feel about the idea of Falling Upward? How might your feelings toward the concept change if you were in the other half of life than you are now ?