

Do you remember how sitcoms, particularly in the eighties and early nineties would always, usually like once a season, through in those, “Tonight on a very special episode of...” fill in the blank of whatever you’re watching, in order for the show to tackle a super serious topic or to drive home some sort of moral imperative depending on what was going on in the world surrounding it? The examples from TV history are rampant, Full House giving DJ an eating disorder for one episode, Saved by the Bell having Jessie get addicted to speed in order to do everything she feels pressured to do, Mr. Belvedere had Wesley avoid one of his friends who had contracted HIV from a blood transfusion, and not to be outdone, my girls, the golden ladies of Miami, had countless numbers of very special episodes, but there’s one in particular I’ve been thinking about this week.

In 1988, The Golden Girls decided to tackle homelessness and poverty on a very special episode entitled, “Brother Can You Spare That Jacket?” The general premise is that the girls have bought a lottery ticket that low and behold ends up being worth \$10,000. On that same day, Blanche has just bought this rough, kind of beat up, leather aviator jacket. In order to keep the ticket safe, she puts the ticket in the pocket of her jacket, and of course because every good sitcom episode needs an incident of miscommunication and chaos, the next day when their minister comes to

pick up items for Goodwill, Sophia sees the beat up looking jacket and throws it on the box because clearly it also is being donated. All sorts of chaos ensues, but the ultimate point is that the girls find themselves at a homeless shelter for the night in search of the jacket. Being mistaken for guests they're given instructions for how things work and bedding for the night and ushered into a massive room filled with people who have no other place to go. Throughout the course of the evening, each of them comes into contact with someone who rocks their world.

For Blanche, it's a young man who tells her he is in Miami for school, but who later reveals he had already finished his degree, but couldn't find a job and is now a homeless alcoholic. Rose sits down with a woman who also happened to grow up in Minnesota and is about her same age, who lost her job because she was told she was too old to keep it. Sophia and Dorothy run into a woman Sophia used to be friends with at Shady Pines, who has wound up at the shelter because she ran out of money and none of her family would take her in. As the lights go out, the girls gather together to search for the jacket without disruption. Eventually they find it, but the joy they were expecting to feel has dissipated. They look at the ticket, then out at all the people they have just spent the evening getting to know, and they exit solemnly. They run into the priest who runs the shelter as they're leaving,

and without a word passed between them, Sophia hands the ticket over to him, and they live to the tune of “Brother Can You Spare a Dime.”

It was a stark message for them to have driven home. They had spent all this time focusing on what they were going to buy with that money, only to have the reality of the world placed right before them. To some people, \$10 was unfathomable, let alone \$10,000. It was a lesson in priorities and perspective, one that happens not only in sitcoms but in scripture as well, and so we find ourselves smack dab in the middle of our gospel, which would could just as easily subtitle, today on a very special episode of the Gospel of Mark.

We have an extremely devout man approach Jesus, and not just approach him, but kneel before him. He acknowledges Jesus with his whole body, and he wants to know one thing...what must he do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus basically tells him, he's almost got the whole thing down. He's followed the commandments his whole life, but...filled with compassion, Jesus broaches the very special topic. This man has one problem, his stuff. Jesus tells him that he lacks one thing, he needs to sell what he owns, give the money to the poor, and then come and follow him. It's a clear call to discipleship. Follow me. And the man goes away in grief,

because he knows Jesus is right, and he isn't entirely sure he can do it,
because he has a lot of stuff, and how can he part with all of that?

After he leaves, Jesus gives this huge teaching to the disciples about wealth, the kingdom of heaven, and our deep commitment to our stuff. And God bless him, here comes Peter. You can practically feel the excitement vibrating off of him. Jesus! Look at all of us! We did that! We did the thing you just told that guy to do! We left all our stuff behind and followed. He sounds like a puppy waiting for a treat. Tell us we're awesome! Please, please, please, we did exactly what you said. Eternal life is ours! Yes!

And there we are at the point of our very special episode: it's not about us. It's not about us, it's not about our stuff, it's about God, it's about our neighbor. It's about everything *besides* us. For this man who approached Jesus, Jesus told him he lacked one thing, but he never specifies what that one thing is. I dare to guess that the one thing he lacks is honest to goodness full worship of God, devotion to God, because Jesus recognizes that his heart is divided. He loves God, but he loves his stuff more. He loves God, but he wants to be comfortable and taken care of while he does that. He loves God, but the idea of giving up all of his stuff for the sake of his neighbor is one step too far. For Peter, he thinks he's got the whole thing down, he left all his stuff behind, he heeded the call to follow, but he too

lacks that one thing, because he revealed in that giddy statement that he still holds on to some devotion to himself. Humility hasn't quite sunk in for Peter yet. He so desperately wants Jesus to assure him that he's gotten it all perfectly right and his place in heaven is assured, and Jesus is like, dude, you still don't get it. It's not about you. It's about the people I have called you to serve. It's about the ministry you left all your stuff behind to do. Neither of them get it. They're like can't it be about God like 95% of the time, but the other five is reserved for us, for our stuff, for the things we really want to focus on? And Jesus, filled with compassion, says no...it can't be. It's gotta be 100%, of your self, of your heart, of your devotion. Your wealth, your self, it cannot be more beloved than your neighbor.

And let's face it, we don't want to hear this gospel. I mean sure we can pretend and say any number of things, we're not *that* wealthy, we don't like our stuff *that much*, we're extremely devoted to God, we're in church aren't we? We could say Jesus is exaggerating to make a point. We could say that Jesus was trying to keep Peter's ego in check. But the thing is, all of those things are just excuses to not confront the truth that this gospel places right in front of our face. Our relationship with our wealth, our stuff, our own sense of righteousness is not healthy. And that is just not a message we want to hear in 21st century America, where we're constantly sold the

message that the richer you are, the bigger you are, the more bright and shiny you are, the more important you are, the more loved you are. We feed into the mentality that a lot of people in Jesus' time had, if you were wealthy and well off then that was a sign of God's blessing. But we actually take that a step further now, because not only do we think that it means God loves us more, but it also feeds into our own sense of self-importance. *I* earned all of this, *I* am deserving of all of this, look at me, look at my life, aren't I just plain awesome?!

Rarely, if ever, do we look around at all of our plain awesome and wonder how we can use that to help others, how we can put others before ourselves. We would rather bask in the glory of our own selves than look outside our four walls and ask how can we make this world better? How can we help make our neighbors' lives better? It is always about us and it is never about others, and that is the polar opposite of what Jesus has called us to, but somehow we will perform all sorts of mental gymnastics to convince ourselves that Jesus is ok if we put ourselves first, if we hoard our wealth, and if we sit in judgment of others who aren't as well off as we are.

I mean let's put this in perspective. The CEO of Hunger Free America said that he would estimate that to eradicate hunger in America it would cost roughly \$25 billion. Ok, that's a lot of money. However, do you

know how much Jeff Bezos is worth? \$186.6 billion. Six times the amount it would cost to eradicate hunger. SIX TIMES! And yet, if we were to be honest with ourselves, we would probably say that the people who are hungry in this country should fix their problem themselves because clearly they got themselves into that position, and we would expound on what a great philanthropist Jeff Bezos is, instead of asking what kind of world we have created where we judge the hungry more harshly than the billionaire who is hoarding his wealth to fund individual trips to space?

And I know, the situation of our world is more complicated than that, but what isn't complicated is caring for our neighbor with genuine empathy and compassion, not silent judgment and resentment that we have to take care of them. The love of Christ is not complicated. The call to follow me is not complicated. We try to make it complicated so we have excuses for why we don't listen, for why we don't show that love, but it's not. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love God, love your neighbor more than your stuff. Do not worship at the altar of wealth. It's a simple message, but one that is extremely hard to live out in the world we live in, but just because it's hard doesn't excuse us from trying. We are living in a daily very special episode, where our neighbors are hungry and crying out for help. So, what are we going to do, change the channel or do something about it? **AMEN!!!**