

Sunday Sermon – 13th Luke – The Rich Young Ruler – 2015-11-29

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In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

It really is all about the money. The Bible and our faith is all about how we should rightly use our time, talent and treasure to express our love for God and neighbor. This is the third Sunday in a row where it really is all about the money. The parable of the Rich Fool, the Parable of the Good Samaritan and now the parable of the Rich Young Ruler – these are all about how we use our money to evidence, to reveal, to show our love for God and our neighbor in need. Let's understand them properly. We often hear a Bible passage misquoted. Money is NOT the root of all evil. St. Paul says to his disciple Timothy in his first letter (6:10), *"For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs."*

Today's Gospel reading is very similar to one in Matthew's Gospel (19:16-30) where the man is referred to a young man. In today's Gospel, he is referred to as a certain ruler. When taken together, we come up with the Rich Young Ruler. In the passage from Matthew, Jesus adds "love your neighbor as yourself" to the list of commandments.

In both passages Jesus only lists five of the Ten Commandments. He leaves off the first four having to do with loving and obeying God and lists five of the six having to do with loving our neighbor – do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness and honor your father and mother. Does anyone know which one Jesus left off? It's the last one, "Do not covet". Since this man had so much wealth, he probably didn't covet anyone else's money but he sure was really attached to his own.

Jesus next words fell on this man like a ton of bricks. *"You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."* (Luke 18:22) The man now becomes very sorrowful. Jesus sees this and says, *"How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."* (Luke 24b-25)

Now there have been many interpretations of this verse. The most likely one is related to a small gate into Jerusalem called The Eye of the Needle. If a camel was to pass through it, it would have to be stripped of all its cargo first before being able to pass through. Likewise, for us who have so very much, God needs us to strip ourselves of these things, things that we cling to instead of Him, that we cling to instead of using them to show honor and appreciation to God and love and compassion to our neighbor. If we have truly honored God and loved our neighbor with our wealth, if our heart really is with God and not with our wealth, then we can have confidence that we will be allowed to enter God's Kingdom -- but how very hard this is!

Brothers and sisters, living here in America at this time, we are almost all Rich Young Rulers. We have much more than we need, and yes some of us have more than others, but very few of us give God His due, 10% of all we make. We also do not love our neighbor as ourselves and give them their due 3.3% of all we make. This is the legal standard. All good Jews understood and did this as a minimum including the Rich Young Ruler in today's Gospel, the lawyer, priest and Levite in the Good Samaritan story and countless others...and many of them have still missed out on Heaven!

As Christians, we are called give above and beyond that legal standard, as a way of acknowledging that all we own belongs to God. Few of us can even muster enough faith, enough love for God to even meet the legal standard of the tithe and a third of a tithe. We should not however walk away sorrowful but rather repent and change our lives, change our focus from our things to the One from Whom those things came.

Jesus does not leave us, the Rich Young Ruler or His Disciples without hope. We hear Jesus say at the end of today's Gospel reading, *"The things that are impossible with men are possible with God."* (Luke 18:27) In the passage that comes next in the Bible, we are given more specific instructions. Peter, pleading his case, says to Jesus, *"See, we have left all and followed You."* (Luke 18:28) Jesus reassures him and says, *"Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life."* (Luke 18:29-30)

So what does that mean for you and me today? Do you have to become a poor missionary in order to be blessed by God and get into Heaven? Maybe, if that is what God is calling you to do. Do you have to become a monk or a nun in order to get into Heaven? Again, yes, if that is what God is calling you to do. What it DOES mean is

that God should be our top priority, the only One, the only thing we worship. If anything - people, power, position, possessions or pluton (the Greek word for riches) – is more important to us than God, then these things keep us from entering God’s Kingdom and from enjoying the full blessings of the Christian life while we are on this earth.

We cannot truly love our family, our parents, our spouse, our children, our siblings or anyone else, if do not love God first and most. Divine agape love will then enable us to truly love others as we should. Giving God His due 10% and our neighbor in need their due 3.3% is just the minimum legal standard that evidences our obedience. God wants our whole heart, mind, soul and strength. When we give these to God, then we can begin to truly enjoy both the things and the people in our life in a way that is a blessing to us and not a curse against us.

When we truly give God our whole heart, mind, soul and strength, we can begin to truly love our neighbor as we love ourselves, because we have begun to love ourselves as God has loved us and gave Himself for us. Real love is sacrificial love. No matter how much or how little you have, if you do not have this divine, sacrificial, agape love, you have nothing and no hope of entering God’s Kingdom, of getting into heaven.

Remember however that, *“The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.”* Get on your knees and ask for God’s help to love Him as He has instructed you to. If you do this with an honest heart, God will give you the faith, the strength and the means you need to love Him and to love others above and beyond any legal standard. You will be blessed to truly know God in this life and to have the blessings of heaven while you are still on this earth. You WILL then have the blessed assurance of life together with Him and all the saints in God’s Kingdom, together in Heaven forever.

To God be the glory, now and forever, and to the ages of ages, Amen.