

October 11, 2009 Sermon

One Sunday while my husband Tim was serving in his first parish,
the senior pastor did a children's sermon on sharing
He had it all worked out.
He took a big bowl of candy. More than he would need.
And then he asked the children to sit in a circle on the floor.
Next he instructed the children to take, one at a time, as much candy as they wanted.

Well, you can guess what happened.
One by one the children grabbed as much candy as their little hands could hold.
More than their hands could hold.

Candy was spilling all over the floor as the children dived for it.
By the time the fourth child went to get some candy, there was nothing left.

Now this is exactly what the pastor was hoping for.

This was going to be the basis for his teaching moment.

So he took back the empty bowl and started into his message.

He said, "oh my. Look there is no more candy left.

Look only four of you have candy while the rest of the group has nothing.

Now it is not that there isn't enough candy.

It's just that some of you have more than you need.

Here's what we're going to do. Those of you who have candy are going
to share it and then everyone will get some.

Well, he barely got that out of his mouth,

When one of the little boys who was clutching so much candy in his fists that it was
falling in his lap,

Looked directly at him and said, "Share. You must be crazy!"

In our Gospel story Jesus said to man, "**You lack 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.**" **When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.**

Let's take a look at **how** this whole encounter between Jesus and the man started:

The man asked Jesus, "**What must I do to inherit eternal life?**"

And Jesus replied. "What do the commandments tell you?"

Don't steal, Don't commit adultery, Don't bear false witness, Don't murder, Don't defraud

Honor your parents

The man said, "Yes, yes! I have done all of these things since my youth!"

The man must have been thinking that he had it made.

He knew he had kept all those commandments.

Even the one about defrauding the poor.

For he knew that he had gained his wealth through ethical means.

He must have thought he had it made!

But instead of affirming his accomplishments, Jesus adds another requirement. He tells the man to go and sell all his possessions and give to the poor.

Now, the text says that before Jesus made this request he looked at the man and loved him.

That's important.

Jesus does not add this additional requirement out of judgment or malice, Instead, he adds it out of love.

When the text says that Jesus looked at the man.

It means he not just looked at him, **but he also looked inside him.**

Jesus looked into the man's heart and found the one thing that was still in the way of his giving himself to Jesus.

his love of his possessions and his money.

And apparently Jesus was "right on the mark" because when the man heard Jesus' command, he left grieving, because he owned many possessions.

And as the man walked away, Jesus used it as a teaching moment, turning to his disciples and saying, "

How hard it will be for the rich to get into heaven. He said. It would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle, than it will be for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God"

Now this was probably pretty shocking to the disciples because, the prevailing thought of that time was that wealth and possessions directly correlated to how much favor you had in God's eyes.

Remember in the Hebrew Scriptures, God's blessing meant wealth and long life.

But now, Jesus is flipping that concept upside-down to show the disciples how our material possessions can too often take us further away from God, rather than draw us closer to God.

What Jesus was saying here is that it is not our **stuff** that is going to prevent them from entering heaven,

it is our **attachment to our stuff** that interferes with our relationship with God.

it is our Love of our stuff.

It is the worship of our money.

Now we may think that we are beyond all that.

We might think, "I like my things, but I certainly don't worship them!"

But let's imagine for a moment:

That I get up in the pulpit one Sunday and tell you that Heaven is promised to you, but first you have to sell everything you have,

not some of it, not what you think you don't need, but sell EVERYTHING that you own, and give to money to the poor.

Or

Imagine for just a moment, if I as your pastor told you that in order for you to be a member in good standing at LCR you were now **REQUIRED** to tithe To give at **LEAST 10%** of your income **BEFORE TAXES** to the ministry here at LCR And then told you that I was going to require every person to prove their giving level by providing your tax returns for review. (by the way, there are pastors who do this)

Imagine for a moment how you would likely respond.
My guess is that many of you would be pretty angry...
Some of you would write me nasty emails and letters,
Some of you would go to the church council meeting and complain.
And some of you would leave and never come back.

The text says that the man went away grieving because he had many possessions
So how are we any different?

You see, we have become so accustomed to our stuff,
so attached to our possessions,
so dependent our things,
that we cannot even imagine what life would be like without them.

The truth is that we put our trust in our things more than we put our trust in God.
And if we had to make the hard choice between Jesus and our stuff...
stuff including our paychecks and houses and cars and investment accounts,
we would be hard-pressed to choose Jesus.

So like the man in the story, we still have things that stand in the way of our loving God with our whole heart.
instead, we end up giving God a little piece of our hearts.
A piece of our time.
A piece of our lives.

That was the problem with the man in the story too.
When Jesus looked at the man, he saw what was holding him back,
And it was **that thing** that Jesus asked him to give up.
Not because his possessions were bad in and of themselves,
But because his possessions had become his "god".

Are we any different?.
There will always be something that we put ahead of God.
There will always be something that holds us back from giving ourselves fully to Christ
Something that keeps us from
Loving the Lord our God will all our heart and mind and soul..

So where does that leave us?
What then can we do to inherit eternal life?

Jesus' answer is the same for us, as it was for the man and for the disciples.

NOTHING.

We are as likely to be able to earn ourselves the kingdom of God,
As a camel is able to go through the eye of a needle.

It's Impossible. It can't be done.

And that's exactly Jesus' point.
The man had asked the wrong question.

it's not about what we can do.
Because when it comes to God, we can do nothing..

It's all about what God can do.

It's about what God has already done in Christ.

In just a few weeks we will celebrate Reformation Sunday
And the main point of the Reformation is that

. We can't do it ourselves;,
our earthly money will not buy our way in,
Our worldly status will not reserve us a place,

We can't do it.

But God can. And God has.

the text says that Jesus looked at the man and loved him.

Jesus looked into the man's heart and saw his weaknesses,
And still he loved him.

The same is true with us.

God loves us in spite of our weaknesses.

God loves us completely even when our love for God is incomplete in return.

I wonder what would have happened if the man hadn't walked away?

My guess is that Jesus would have continued to love him, even in his weakness.

Just as he loved his other disciples in their weakness.

Even though the 12 had left "everything" as Peter put it,

Jesus reminded them of their own limitations.

Jesus reminded them that this was all about what He would do for them,
Not what they could do for Him.

So our relationship with God is secured by Christ.

It is only in response to that saving action that God calls us to do something.

And what does God call us to do?

God calls us to be kingdom people

God calls us, in spite of our weaknesses, to live in a new way.

To live lives that are centered on the "stuff" that is really important.

On spiritual treasures rather than material treasures.

So how have you responded to Jesus' call?

And how will you respond today?

God has already taken the first step in Jesus, will you take the next?

Amen