

Sermon - October 11, 2009- Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
The Very Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder

Mark 10:17-31

“Lord, take my lips and speak through them; take my mind and think through it; take my heart and set it on fire for your Holy Gospel.” +Amen.

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “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.”

Ouch! Why would Christ tell this man, a good man that had followed the commandments of the Torah his whole life, that he still lacked “one thing” in the eyes of God? Jesus tells him to sell his many possessions and give this money to the poor, and then he may come on the Way of following Jesus the Christ. Jesus uses such pointed language to illustrate the great difficulty that Christians will have in following Jesus in the way that God expects. And this is because Jesus does not want some of you, Jesus wants all of you.

Anglican theologian and author, C. S. Lewis in his classic work Mere Christianity, describes it this way, *Christ says, ‘Give me all. I don’t want so*

much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours.'

Within our humanity each and every one of us struggle with something that keeps us from following Jesus with our full potential. And for many, Christ knew that it would be money and possessions. This was certainly true for this man, he went away despondent after Christ's request. Money and materialism put before the place of God and seen as security, power, and a goal, separates us from following Jesus Christ. It is a breach of the First Commandment; *Thou shall have no other Gods before me.*

But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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."

As strange as this analogy is to us it was easily understood in first century Palestine. A rich man would carry all of his possessions on the back of a camel. So that if you were rich with many possessions, your camel would

become heavy laden and wide with your material wealth—your stuff. A poor man’s camel would not be packed wide—his camel passes through the eye, while the rich man’s gets stuck, thus keeping him from the kingdom of God. Jesus points to materialism 2000 years ago, as the great inhibitor of faith and following the Way of Christ. Has anything changed in the 21st century? The simple answer, no.

Almost three years ago, my mother went to eternal life with our Lord after an extended battle with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. I had the great privilege of being at the bedside of my mother, with my father, as she died in their home. The hospice nurse was there as well. And it was a privilege because my mother was teaching me right up until her death. And yet, my father gave me incredible gifts as well.

Later that morning, my father and I sat together in the great room of their home in Hilton Head, and my father said: *Look at all of this, none of it means anything.* After 54 years of marriage my parents had many nice things, yet I would never say that they were materialistic. Yet, how true those words of my father and how ironic that most of us, and most Christians never seem to get it... and live out of that truth.

“None of it means anything,” was the truth that Jesus was imparting to his disciples then, and God imparts to us today. The lives that you and I are

seeking as Christians are ones that are transformed from the worldly understanding of what is important to the Godly one. When we live out of this place the question is not “how much can I get and keep,” but rather, “how may I give and serve.” And the more that we live in this place, the more we are aligned with God. Jesus said, *Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house...or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age...and in the age to come eternal life.* When we are generous, God is generous in return; this is one of the great mysteries of our faith and the universe.

One of the beautiful little girls of Trinity came up to me this week, tugged on my jacket and said, “Dean, what is God like?” Generous...God is like the most generous person we could ever imagine. What are we like? Are we like God? **+Amen.**