

Westminster Presbyterian Church
Vero Beach, Florida 32966
Rev. Dr. Les Koerselman
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Psalm 91:1, 2; 9-16

Romans 10:8-13

Luke 18:18-30

“And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’” And he said, “All these I have observed from my youth.” And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” But when he heard this he became sad, for he was very rich. Jesus looking at him said, “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.” Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” But he said, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.” And Peter said, “Lo, we have left our homes and followed you.” And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.””

“The Cross of Separation”

Dear friends in Christ. I don't know if there is anyone present today that is not concerned in some dimension about money or the resources we need to live adequately and free of anxiety and stress.

Did you realize that ministers are no different? There are times when we are concerned about Church budgets. Will there be enough to adequately fund the programs that we have and also to expand our mission giving? The story is told of a rabbi, a Catholic priest and a Baptist clergyman who were gathered together. They were talking about this very problem – about the offerings of God's people and how they should be spent. The Baptist minister said, “Well, I try to take very little for myself. I take a big string and make a circle on the floor in my office. I stand in the middle of it. I take the offering plates and throw the money in the air. Whatever lands inside the circle, I feel that God has given to me, that which is outside the circle will be used for the Church.”

The Catholic priest said, "Well, that's interesting. I have a similar practice with a slight variation. I too place a big circle on the floor, and I too stand in the middle of it, and I too throw the offering plates up in the air, but I figure whatever lands inside the circle is God's and whatever lands outside the circle is mine." The rabbi said, "How strange! I too have a similar practice. I too take the offering plates and I too throw the offerings in the air, and I figure whatever God catches he can have and whatever falls on the floor is mine." You might think this is going to be a stewardship sermon – it is not.

You might tend to believe that when you look at an overall account of the Gospel records that our Lord was always a shining success. Certainly it is true that he was a dynamic teacher who possessed a charismatic personality. He demonstrated divine power when he healed or raised individuals from the dead. But, there were moments when our Blessed Lord was an absolute failure. In his hometown he was nearly thrown out of the synagogue, because he dared to proclaim that the day of the Lord had come. *"Today these words have been fulfilled in your hearing"* and the people rose up against him. The footnote to his ministry in Nazareth is tragic because it says, *"Because of their unbelief, he was unable to do no great work there."* You have other instances where the word of God that he proclaimed fell upon stony ground. The people were unreceptive. They liked a free box lunch, but they were unwilling to take up a cross and follow Him.

Our Scripture lesson today speaks of a man who came with a great need and yet left unchanged and unrepentant. He was an individual of some importance, but an individual who was struggling with life, **as do we all**. In today's jargon we might well say, "He was trying to get his act together." We look at Hollywood stars that have it all and we might well say, "Why don't you get your act together?"

It appears from the text that this young man was a successful businessman. We don't know if he had inherited his wealth or if he had earned it. But he had it all – he had servants, a home that was undoubtedly the talk of the town, a family that apparently liked him and enjoyed his company, and a man of high moral standards. He was religious in nature. We might say he was "Joe regular". When the synagogue doors were opened he was there seated in the front pew. Yet, yet all the segments of his life, each worthy in their own right, did not satisfy the longing in his soul. The pieces of his life formed a rather disjointed and out-of-focus picture. Surely he should have been satisfied, after all, all he had to do was to look at those 'round about him.

Sixty percent of the populous living in our Lord's Day and age were slaves. They were born slaves and they died slaves. The majority of the people in our Lord's Day and age worked all day long, from sun up to sun down, to earn enough to buy food to satisfy their physical hunger. They lived hand to mouth day after day. Three out of ten were employed by the Roman government. If you think that we have big government – Rome had a huge government. Working in the employ of Rome had its own perks. Graft and corruption were rampant. You could advance yourself through illegal payoffs. Five percent of the population was engaged in military service. After twenty years a soldier could retire and in many cases he was awarded citizenship.

This young man was in the top 5% of the socio-economic ladder – he had it made. Why wasn't he happy? He had position, power and wealth, and yet he kept asking as the old song says, "Is that all there is?"

Fundamental to our existence is to discover who God wants us to be. The essence of this is to find meaning in life. We each need to discover the right direction for our God intended purpose. This alone satisfies the hunger of the soul. This young man was no different than we are. We too need to discover who we are, what our purpose in life is meant to be and the reason for our existence. Many people I talk to are having difficulties in life and attribute their lack of happiness to wrong decisions. They chose things that they thought would satisfy their basic human desires, but they were the base level desires. They neglected the things of the Spirit and the things of God. Now there is a deep hunger of the soul and a rising discontent within.

A great many people live life like the woman who won the grocery store prize. It was the grand opening, tickets had been drawn and for her prize, she was allowed to go throughout the grocery store for twenty minutes on a shopping spree. We see her dashing about the isles with a cart laden with groceries grabbing from every shelf things that she desired. She skids around the corner as the bell sounds and arrives at the checkout counter wheezing and puffing. For a time there will be joy and satisfaction. Her family will eat well, but eventually the food will be gone and hunger will return.

A number of years ago a man in Pennsylvania won the lottery. He joyfully collected the lottery believing that now his troubles were over. This man had struggled all his life and now he said, "I'm on easy street, I've got it made. What a wonderful thing, how fortunate I am. The happiness, the joy that I deserve in life is now at long last mine." Just the opposite happened. His former landlady sued him in a court of law because she believed she deserved part of the lottery prize. She won. His wife left him. His business failed and his own brother-in-law, having been refused a share in the winnings, took out a contract to have him killed. Misery and heartache followed his winning.

For many individuals living in our society today, their lives are examples of this man and woman. They dash through life picking from shelves – opportunities, pleasures, material objects that for a time do satisfy, but then the hunger to discover life in all its wonder, beauty and mystery returns. This is the aching hunger within each of us. It is buried deep within our souls and remains unsatisfied until we discover Christ. This young man found himself in such a state – hungry for meaning and disappointed with life.

When we discover our calling in life it must be an endeavor which will glorify God and enrich others. To live and work simply for self is the shallowest of endeavors and the least rewarding. If we choose a vocation in life which only provides financial gain, we will forfeit the best that life has to offer. Surely heartache will follow. The Westminster Confession is right. The chief end of man is to glorify God and then to enjoy him forever.

Alexander McClaren said, “All along the pathway to increasing holiness thoughts of self must die. The pathway to spiritual beauty is stained with the bloody footprints of the wounded self love and the denial of self.” The question must be raised. “Are you willing to deny yourself in order to gain Christ?”

Christ confronted the man with the obstacle which had caused his unhappiness. “Go and sell all that you have and give it to the poor and come follow me.” Notice that our Blessed Lord did not condemn the wealth of this man. Rather, he condemned the false sense of security that the wealth had given to this young man.

Honest labor rewarded with financial gain, I believe, is a blessing from God. Then it becomes the awesome responsibility to those who have been blessed in such a way to share those financial resources in helping those who have not. It’s free enterprise with a heart. It’s capitalism with compassion.

The young man was caught in the web of materialism. His wealth had become for him his security blanket. No matter how much he desired to find himself and in the process discover God, he abhorred the idea that his money stood in the way. If he would separate himself from his positions, Christ said he would find himself. *“He who would loose his life for my sake will surely find it.”* Separation is an aspect of the cross that touches reality and our existence. But we must be aware that wealth alone is not the barrier to really embracing Christ. Listen to this!!!

Anything in all of life that diminishes our desire or our capability of serving and loving God must be sacrificed. For therein those things become idols, idols that demand our allegiance and negate the living God. Each one of us must shoulder the cross. No one can do it for another. It is our individual responsibility as well as our individual joy. In order to discover Christ, take up your cross. This is the challenge of Lent.

The intellectual self and the desires of the inner man recoil at such a thought. Why should I have to abdicate all in order to gain the greater good? It is a burden too heavy. It is a task too great; a sacrifice too monumental. It cannot be contemplated and therefore, it cannot be embraced. Yet, I would encourage you (if you truly wish to discover your God-given identity) you must eradicate all that dims your vision of Jesus Christ. There can be no partial surgery here. No cosmetic covering. No semi-religious attempt. It's all or nothing. It's a radical elimination of all and herein lies the cross. When you can say truly with the hymn writer, "I surrender all, I surrender all, all to Jesus I surrender, I surrender all," then the gateway to paradise swings wide and the glory of the Lord will be manifested in your life.

Questions to ask that need to be answered:

- Does your family come before Christ?
- Does your position in life come before Christ?
- Does social standing come before Christ?
- Does your work come before Christ?
- Does a busy agenda come before Christ?
- Does the love of retirement come before Christ?
- Does a love of ease come before Christ?

The cross of separation leads to union with Him.

Joseph Bowering wrote these words:

In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story,
Gathers round its head sublime.

And then this beautiful verse:

When the sun of bliss is beaming,
Light and love upon my may,
From the cross the radiance streaming,
Adds more luster to the day.

We end as we began with these words from our Savior. Notice the import of them and hear them again:

“Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”