Jesus And The Rich Kid
Matthew 19:16-26
Preached by Rev Dr. Harry Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
Sunday, October 4, 2009

Matthew's story of Jesus' brief but telling conversation with the rich kid should make us ask, "What's that one thing keeping me from giving myself completely over to God?"

Look long and hard at this young man until you can see yourself. He said from childhood he honored the Law of Moses and lived within God's will. But Jesus rightly discerned he lacked one thing. The remedy: "Go sell all your possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, follow me and then you'll have eternal life.

Who was this young man? Obviously his father was wealthy so naturally he never lacked for anything. If he lived in our time and place, I'd imagine him being educated in the best schools and presently learning the family business. Growing up he played golf at the country club, spent summers at their house in the Hamptons, skied in Colorado during winter break and traveled the world first class with his parents. He wears designer clothes and a rolodex watch, drives a Porsche convertible and never once had to worry about money because his life was absolutely financially secure.

But despite his pampered lifestyle, he's by no means an empty suit. Raised in a Christian home he grew up in the church. He attended Sunday school, bible studies and became a leader in the youth fellowship. He never got into trouble, in fact just the opposite, being a respected role model for his peers he kept some friends out of trouble. Everybody thought this young man was the real deal, and he was…but then Jesus burst his bubble when be looked him straight in the eye and said, "But you lack one thing…"

Straight away knowing Jesus was right on the money, he sadly turned and walked away because he couldn't, he wouldn't do as Jesus asked.

That's when Jesus famously announced, "How much harder it will be for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle."

This saying greatly disturbed his disciples. Even though they weren't rich, something tells me they perceived this rich young man took God as seriously as themselves. That's why they were completely incredulous and asked one another, "If this good man can't make it, who can be saved?"

Hopefully today we're all asking the same question. Sure, none of us are wealthy, but we do worry about our finances especially now in this economy. Friends and neighbors, maybe you, worry about getting pink slipped or salary cuts. To top it off some

of us have debts and school tuitions to pay. Others have taken on second jobs and still others can't find any. So, we're nothing like the rich young man I just described.

And yet, when compared with the vast majority of people alive in the world today, we are the wealthy ones. True, everything is relative, but none of us go hungry, lack clothing or housing. In fact, on average we're the best clothed, fed and housed people in human history, but as I said, from our vantage point it's all relative.

You need to know whenever I prepare my sermons I find myself preaching to myself, and this passage has become a helpful reminder helping me keep my priorities straight at this time in our congregation's history.

Last Sunday and this morning you heard two thoughtful reports on the budget deficits we are facing primarily due to the recession and several families who were historically generous contributors relocating out of state. As your pastor, you can imagine these unpleasant realities have kept me up some nights. In my unguarded moments I become anxious, until I sense God inviting me to rest in his presence and recall God's continued faithfulness throughout my life.

But my problem is this time, these fears won't quit. They keep plugging away and testing my trust in God's provision, until I again hear his still small voice reinviting me to rest in his presence and trust one way or another God will provide.

I'm sure all of you have had similar experiences. Money's tight, the future uncertain, and despite our economizing, money's still tight and the future remains uncertain.

So, what message is God sending us today, in this financial climate?

How about this: we need to remind each other of God's promised provision. The Exodus story of manna from heaven is a good place to start.

After the Exodus from Egypt Moses led the Hebrews into the desert before they could go home to the Promised Land, because in the wilderness, the Hebrews would learn how to trust their lives to God as part of their restoration as the Chosen People. This restoration process was seemingly interrupted when their food ran out. They became anxious and started complaining, "Did you bring us out here to die Moses?" That's when God provided the manna from heaven, which was really a sweet-tasting, natural substance containing carbohydrates that regularly appears in the desert after the morning dew evaporates. God, through Moses then instructed the people to go out each morning to collect only enough for one day, no more no less. Naturally there were some who wouldn't trust and obey and gathered up more than they needed, only to smell a putrid odor penetrating from the hiding places in their tents the next morning.

Certainly this biblical theme becomes even more focused in Jesus' teachings, especially his Sermon on the Mount. "Therefore I tell you do not worry about your life,

what you will eat or drink or what you will wear…Look at the birds of the air…your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable then they? ...So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself…" (Matthew 6:25-27; 31, 34)

Keep in mind Jesus was primarily speaking to an audience living on the edge. They didn't have job security or any guarantees their families would be adequately fed or clothed.

You may think, "It sounds good Jesus, but I can't afford to 'don't worry, be happy' in my present situation," to which Jesus would respond, "On the contrary you can't afford not to worry if you want the security of the full, abundant life.

Which now brings us to the rich kid's question that originally opened up this discussion. Remember, he asked, "Good Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"

Whether or not he really knew what he was asking for, if we understand what he was asking for, we can fully appreciate Jesus' answer. The key phrase in his question is "eternal life." When the Bible speaks of eternal life it's not just the concept of spiritual immortality, your personality living on for all eternity. Eternal life is even bigger than that. How much better would our quality of life be in this world, if we could grasp this truth: Eternal life, the full, abundant life Christ offers isn't something we must wait for until we die and go to heaven. Instead God makes eternal life available to us in the here and now. Take time this week to reread the Sermon on the Mount. It's a prescription for Kingdom living here on earth in spite of the trials and tribulations we all inevitably face. His Beatitudes shows us his way, the only way to really experience inner peace and joy, not only during the best of times, but especially during the worst of times.

Again you may be thinking, "Sounds good in theory, but it's impossible to live like that all the time! The disciples would agree with you. "Then who can be saved?" they asked after Jesus likened entering heaven to a camel going through the eye of a needle. Jesus' answer? "For mortals it's impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

You see, your salvation isn't based on what you can do for God (remember the rich kid's erroneous assumption in his question, "What must I do to EARN eternal life.") but on what God has done for you. You can only begin to experience the full, abundant life here and now only because Jesus gave up his life for you. So the question is what in return are you willing to give up for God?

I hope you realize Jesus doesn't call everybody to sell their possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. But everybody is called to give up whatever it is, be it an unhealthy attitude or behavior, that keeps you from receiving from God the one thing you lack.

This is Worldwide Communion Sunday when Christians around the world both affluent and poor come together around our Lord's Table to celebrate the true wealth

found only through Christ our Lord. It may take a recession to make us realize it, but it's far better to trust in riches money cannot buy, God's love and provision, our family and friends and the gift of eternal life.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Amen.