

I really hope I can safely assume that everyone here this morning has access to clean drinking water, electricity and medical care. If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a comfortable bed in which to sleep, you are better off than many people in this world who struggle to meet even the most basic of human needs.

Our gospel tells the story of Jesus meeting someone who had great wealth who wanted to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. I wrote down that first verse from our Gospel text on a notepad on my bedside table a few days ago as I contemplated what to say in my sermon this morning. “What must I *do* to inherit eternal life?” Then yesterday I used the same notepad to jot down a household task that needed to be done. It made me laugh anyway to read the first note, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” followed by the second note: “Do laundry!”

“You know the Commandments,” Jesus replied. But the man wasn’t content with the fact that he had kept all the commandments since his youth – somehow, he knows there is more to it than just keeping rules.

Jesus is straight up with this man who asks, “what must I do?” ... “Go and sell everything you have, give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” But for this man, that challenge was too great. His face fell, and he walked away miserable, for he had many possessions. Somehow this man’s *identity* and sense of *security* was bound up with his having many possessions – they had in fact become his idols.

And many of us have found that we have too many possessions! So much so that people will pay good money to take courses on how to declutter, or buy books on how to minimalize, or hire professionals to organize all their stuff!

Sometimes people have a need to hoard things due to a traumatic event in their past – for example I knew some people in England who lived through extreme childhood poverty or neglect, or the scarcity brought on by rationing during WWII.

But the question Jesus is asking is, are we prepared to do whatever it takes to give up the idols in which we place our security and trust? Are we willing to have less and to give more? Are we willing to address our personal insecurities so that we can move forward in the mission of God? The crucial test of the rich man's obedience was whether or not he was willing to commit to following Jesus.

The 19th century writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau defined wealth as “the ability to fully experience life.” The one thing that the man in today's gospel prized most in his life was his wealth. Although he kept God's formal commandments perfectly well, his possessions meant everything to him, for it was through them that he felt he could live life to the fullest. And Jesus knew this – because Jesus is divine, and he sees into our hearts. Remember, our epistle to the Hebrews teaches that the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. God uses the words of Scripture to speak to us. Through today's readings, Jesus may be speaking to **us** to reconsider what it might be in **our** life that we have not been willing to give up for him – something that we idolize which is getting in the way of life in the Kingdom of God.

Life and wealth are about more than just money and possessions - the fullness of life includes living with God and living *for* God. And so we must be **generous** in our giving to people who have need. Giving on “Second Sunday” and to the Foodbank are ways we can do this. We also need to consider our pledges for this church. We will be saying more about pledging over the coming weeks (and we’re a bit late this year because of the timing of my arrival), but I want to encourage you if you haven’t ever made a pledge to give regularly towards the mission and work of this church, please do consider this and speak to me or anyone in the Vestry for more information. We will have pledge forms available soon.

Jesus does want us to give more. Maybe you’re giving as much as you can financially – but giving isn’t just about money, is it? It’s also about giving of our time and our talents. In fact, it’s nothing less than the whole of us – not *for* the church but **as** the church – and to the glory of God! From Jesus, we get life in all its fullness: eternal life.

Jesus calls us to love – to give our all, for the sake of God’s kingdom. He said that anyone who has left house or family or fields for his sake and for the sake of the good news will receive a hundredfold now in this age – and persecutions – wait, what? Persecutions?! Have any of you been persecuted lately because of your faith – your outreach – or your evangelism? Maybe we’re not trying hard enough, though we can feel at times like the odd one out when we talk about our faith or our church. The Episcopal denomination as a whole gets heavily criticized by some for our insistence that all people should be welcomed in the church. Jesus himself was criticized when he included people who were usually outsiders.

You wouldn't think it would be so hard for people to be inclusive as Jesus calls us to be. But it is hard for all of us to give up the things that we cling to as idols. And it's because of this challenging call, Jesus was rejected by his own people, and he still gets rejected by many to this day. As always, people would rather hear a prosperity gospel – that if we follow the rules, we'll be blessed with worldly riches. Meanwhile the poor, the weak and those living at the margins of our society are crying out for love and acceptance, healing and transformation.

The other day I was walking from church out to my car and a young man walked past who was wearing a t-shirt that said "Y'all need Jesus!" This world is broken and yes, in need of Jesus. Think of what God may be asking of you as you receive his gift of eternal life. Give yourself up to Jesus and follow him. Amen.