

SERMON FOR THE 19 SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 2009
YEAR B JOB 231-9 Psalm 22 Hebrews 4:12-16 Mark 10:17-
31

THE RICH YOUNG RULER

No, I did not win the Nobel peace Prize but I was just as honored to be named Rector Emeritus by the vestry. What does it mean you ask? Unlike the Nobel Peace prize there is no money involved. Story of my life! There is never money involved.

It does mean I can ignore the directives of the national church that say: "As the retired rector I have to move, leave the community and never be heard from again." It's sort of like an ecclesiastical witness protection program. However, I still "have title" as it says in the trade.

It also means I get to come back now and then and Jo and I are always quite excited to do that. Our love of this place and this community is too strong to just disappear. And so while Fr. Kevin is in the Emerald isle receiving his sheepskin, I get to be your "Sunday Supply."

However, I am plagued by having four wonderful lessons to preach on. I had a hard time deciding. For instance, Job, scholars tell us is the oldest book in the bible and I would say the most consistently relevant since the questions Job asks are the pertinent questions we all ask when times are tough. "Where is God in my situation?" And then there is that line from Psalm 22 that Our Lord reminds us of on Good Friday, "My God, my God Why hast thou forsaken me and are so far from my cry and from the words of my mouth?" KJV

And then there is the Gospel story commonly called, "The Rich Young Ruler." One could preach for three hours and not cover all the material.

Well, since we don't have a three-hour service let's first look at "The Rich Young Ruler" in Mark.

Let's begin with a little bible study and read to ourselves the first line from the Gospel. "As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before Him." O.K. STOP! I didn't see the word rich, did you? I didn't see the word young, did you? I didn't even see the word ruler.

I guess it's not that important but here's where the appellation comes from. If we read the same story in Matthew 19:16-30, it says he was young. If we read it in Luke 18:18-30 it says he was a ruler but neither Mark, Luke or Matthew says he was rich, just that he had many possessions.

Doesn't that frighten you a little? It frightens me for I have many possessions.

Although I have many possessions I don't think of myself as rich. Oh, I am "wealthy, healthy and wise," as the saying goes. I am not poor but when someone says rich I think of Malcolm Forbes, J.P. Morgan or to be contemporary Bill Gates.

Let's use Bill Gates as a watermark, benchmark and let's say he is the richest person in the world. When Jo and I were in the hospital after the motorcycle accident they kept asking us on a scale of one to ten how would you rate the pain? (On a scale of one to ten I found that relatively annoying on a scale of ten.) But let's say Gates with all his billions is ten and the poorest of the poor are number one. Where would we place ourselves? Well, Kirk Alan Kubicek, of the Episcopal network for stewardship places us in the US globally somewhere around nine. But he also adds that the ideal is around five. Because, he says those who live at five will feel the least disruption in their lives as they tend to deal with the vicissitudes life offers. Which means that most of us in this

country live beyond our means and our possessions tend to possess us, rather than the other way around.

There was a program recently on television that had to do with a malady called "hoarding." These were people who could not throw anything away, and their homes become trash heaps. This one woman couldn't even get to her stove because of all her stuff to cook her meals.

The man in our Gospel reading today who came to Jesus evidently felt his salvation was in all he had, not in all he was. At the end of the day, says Hebrews, and Jesus, it is who we are that matters more than what we have.

That is very difficult to grasp-especially in a culture that urges us to acquire as much as we can get. It is difficult to grasp that letting go may be the most important lesson on our journey to know God.

Notice God's voice only speaks to Job after he has lost everything important to his world and those three idiots known as Job's comforters finally let up with their pop theology.

Yes, in spite of what the Gnostics taught, Jesus was forsaken so that the crucifixion would have meaning. But God was there all along as we learned when all seemed lost.

Question you might ask this parable is, was Jesus forsaking this rich young ruler? But if you go back to the Gospel of Mark you find it says that Jesus, "looking at him loved him," and said, "You lack one thing, sell all you have and give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven then come and follow me."

Saint Francis read these words and felt they directly touched him. Rich soldier son of a wealthy textile manufacturer and he gave up all he had to follow Christ. And I honor that. But the fact that Jesus loved him tells me that he looked into the young man's soul and found things, possessions. Things

that were more important to him than eternal life and the presence of God.

If we, you or I were standing eye to eye before Jesus whom we know loves us because it says so. If he looked directly into our soul as only He could, what would he see standing in the way of our seeing into the essence of The Almighty.

It's a good thing that salvation is only possible with God because God knows we need it. Amen!