

*From the Pulpit of Knox Presbyterian Church*

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October 11, 2009

**HEALING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH MONEY**

*Mark 10:17-31*

To begin let's do a little pondering. Take a moment and consider this question: "How is my relationship with money?" ... Now you may have said to yourself, "I didn't know I had a relationship with money." And I would counter, "We all have some kind of relationship with money." Consider how often you touch money – whether it be the change in your pocket, the bills in your wallet, your ATM/Debit card, your credit card, your check book, or even through your on-line banking. Consider how often you think about money. Will I have enough to pay my bills this month, will I have enough for my retirement years, how much should I save for my children's education, should I invest in long-term care insurance? Some of us may have handled money more often the last few days than we have actually held hands with our spouse, our partner. Some of us may have spent more time worrying about money than praying to God. I suspect that many of us have rarely gone a whole day without spending money or thinking about money. So how is your relationship with money? Is it a healthy relationship or a dysfunctional one?

As evident in today's gospel reading, Jesus is concerned about our relationship with money. Let's take a closer look at the story. A rich man (and we know he is rich by the end of the story) runs up to Jesus and falls on his knees. Now this is an important detail in the story. Many times in the Gospel of Mark those in need of healing humbly fall to their knees before Jesus. A leper kneels before Jesus and begs him to make him clean. Jairus, the synagogue leader, falls at Jesus' feet and begs him to make his daughter well. A Syrophenian woman bows down at Jesus' feet and begs Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter. Again a rich man runs up to Jesus and falls on his knees. Here is a man in need of healing.

The man seems to have it all. He has lots of stuff and lots of money and yet he is restless and anxious. In spite of his worldly success, his many riches and possessions, and even in spite of being a faithful and observant Jew, keeping all of the commandments since he was child, he is restless and unsatisfied. He is struggling with a deep hunger that tells him that there is more to life than his money and his possessions, more to life than doing what is expected of him, like following the law. He is in need of healing and so kneeling devoutly before Jesus he asks a very sincere question, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Now notice another detail in the story. “Jesus, looking at him, loved him.” Although Jesus can see the sickness in this man, he doesn’t look harshly at him. Instead Jesus looks tenderly at the man, sees deep into his heart and knows what is needed for this man to be healed, to be made whole, to know a full and authentic life. Jesus lovingly diagnoses that the man lacks only one thing and like other healing stories Jesus issues a command to those who have fallen on their knees before him to do something. To the rich man he commands: “Get up and go sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” What Jesus understands about this man is that even as admirable as his efforts were in the keeping of the commandments, he had missed the point of the commandments – compassion for the poor, loving the neighbor in need. The key to this man’s healing then was to move from having a self-absorbed relationship with money to having a relationship with the poor – focusing on their needs, serving them, helping them.

Sadly, the rich man cannot do it. “He was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” . He is apparently so addicted to his possessions, to his great wealth, so sick with Affluenza, that he cannot do the one thing that would make him well, that would satisfy his hunger for meaning. Even though Jesus had looked at him and loved him, the man leaves grief-stricken, weeping, alone, returning to his illness. Because he was unwilling or unable to relinquish his hold on his money, possessions, power, and stature and enter into a relationship with the poor, he lost out on a relationship with Jesus, he lost out on a relationship with others who were following Jesus, he lost out on the eternal life he longed for. No wonder he went away grieving. He could not make a commitment to the radical discipleship that Jesus required.

What about you and me? Do we have a healthy relationship with money? If not, what is the one thing that Jesus asks us to do to be made well? Are we willing or is the radical discipleship that Jesus ask of us just too much for us? Before we can answer these questions, we must recognize and accept the fact that we are the rich man. I mean how often have we read or heard this gospel story and dismissed it’s radical call to discipleship believing that it did not apply to us. Take out your wallet and hold it in your hand and with the other hand take out and hold your car keys or your house keys. Compared with the rest of the world, we are rich. Compared with the rest of the world, we have possessions – a home, a bed, a stove, a car, and more – that the poor of the world only dream about it. We are the rich man in the story. The question is, “Just how rich?” There’s a website called “GlobalRichList.com”. You plug in your annual gross income and in a second or less it calculates your rich list position.

I plugged in my gross annual salary of \$44,700 and my rich list position was 108,695,652. I thought, “Well, that must mean I’m way down the list.” No ! Given the fact that world’s population is approaching 7 billion people, my salary puts me in the top 1.8% richest people in the world. 1.8% ! Astounding! Now I don’t know what the median income of this congregation is so I just plugged in an annual gross salary of \$25,000. The rich list position is 605 million which represents the top 10% of the richest people in the world. That too is astounding!

Let’s accept the fact that we are rich, we are the rich man in the story. Like the rich man it is unlikely that we have a healthy relationship with money and given our present economic recession and the economic stresses many of us are facing, our relationship with money may have become even healthier, to the point of no longer trusting God to provide for our needs, no longer willing to respond to God’s grace and blessing in grateful and generous ways. If you tend to be a frugal person perhaps you’ve become even more frugal to the point of being tight-fisted. If you tend to be a fearful person perhaps you’ve become even more fearful to the point of being immobilized. Whatever your ill health with money, what is the one thing that Jesus asks you to do to be well?

There is one answer that applies to us all. It’s what Jesus commands the rich man to do – to relinquish his hold on his money in order to help, to serve, to have a relationship with the poor. Take for example, our monthly “2-cents-a-meal” offering which supports our food pantry and thus our neighbors who are among the poorest in our city, who are finding it difficult to feed their families. For many years we received about \$250 a year in 2 cents a meal offerings and then how wonderful it was the first year we dedicated ourselves to collect a mile worth of pennies and we did! This is the fourth year we will reach and surpass our annual goal of 100,000 pennies or \$1000. That’s good news and yet, we have the potential to give even more. If we all committed ourselves to give 2 cents for each meal, usually 3 meals a day, 350 days a year that would equal \$21 a year. With a potential of 80 adults we could easily grow our offering to \$1600 and with \$21 a year hardly being a sacrifice, I believe we could easily reach 2 miles worth of pennies.

Friends, Jesus looks at us with love. He sees deep into our hearts and knows what is needed to heal our relationship with our money, our possessions. He looks tenderly at us and knows what we need to do to be whole, to lead a full, authentic life – following him, keeping our eyes and our hearts on him instead of the bottom line. What is the one thing Jesus is asking you to do? Are you willing or like the rich man will you go away grieving?

Please pray with me.

Generous God, you bless us with love and mercy, you provide for our needs. Through Jesus you call us to a radical kind of discipleship, asking us to be more concerned about our neighbors in need than our bank accounts. You are our true security, O God. Heal our relationship with our money so that we might truly follow Jesus. Help us to do what the rich man was unable to do, surrender all to Jesus. In his loving name we pray. Amen.