

NINETEENTH WEEKEND AFTER PENTECOST, Oct. 11, 2009

Lessons: Ps. 112, Amos 5: 6-7, 10-15, Hebrews 3: 12-19, Mark 10:17-22

Introduction

Men and women generally shop very differently, don't they? Men seem to know what they want, go into the store and get it and leave. Women know what they want, also, but need to look around a little bit before they finish. Though shopping methods may be different for men and women, shopping in general is a challenge to be met. We check out the ads for the best buys. We make our list, at least in our heads, and we shop, getting in and out quickly, or leisurely taking our time, but we all finally get to the check out counter hearing the cashier ask, "Did you find everything you were looking for?" And looking down at our check out pile, we chuckle because we are checking out with a lot more than we were looking for. In our Gospel lesson, Mark 10, the rich young man who ran up and knelt before Jesus got a lot more than what he was looking for, also. That's always the way Jesus and His Word works in our lives.

THERE'S ALWAYS MORE THAN WE EXPECT WITH JESUS!

And that is what I want to talk to you about a little bit today based upon our Gospel Lesson, Mark 10.

I.

Running up and kneeling before Jesus, you'd think this rich young man recognized Jesus for who and what He really is = God incarnate. But, we soon learn the rich young man simply saw in Jesus a good deal, a good bargain of some self help advice from a wise teacher, a good teacher.

The rich young man certainly asks the appropriate question, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' The question all of us need to be asking ourselves. But, while asking this very, very priceless, very valuable question, the young man wants a cheap deal answer. "What must I do", is the give away. A true inheritance isn't based on what you do, it's based upon the relationship with the person who leaves or gives you their inheritance. Jesus is viewed by this young man as the cashier to ring up the value of this rich young man's merits, his good works, his efforts to earn an inheritance.

For that brief moment, running up and kneeling before Jesus, the young man seems to recognize the real value of Jesus. He even calls Jesus 'good'.

But, being so intent on counting up his own value, 'Do not murder' ching, ching, 'Do not commit adultery' ching, ching, 'Do not steal' ching, ching, 'Do not bear false witness', ching, ching, 'Do not defraud' ching, ching, 'Honor your father and mother', ching, ching, 'Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth' the rich young man misses Jesus whole point 'No one is good except God alone' and dah! Jesus is our good God.

For so many people Jesus is nothing more than a good advice giver, like Dr. Phil or Oprah or a myriad of other life style gurus who we want to affirm our chosen life styles or our personal choices and

give us motivational advice to make our lives more secure and valuable. For so many, Jesus and His Word are cheap advice which you can either take it or leave it.

II.

But, rather than simply giving some cheap bargain motivational advice, Jesus makes a life changing demand of this rich young man. Jesus, tells this guy to give up the most important thing in his life. The one thing he was not willing to sacrifice at that moment = his stuff. Jesus is demanding the young man to expose what he values the most – his life's shopping cart of accumulated stuff. Jesus' demand exposes what's in the young man's heart – self righteousness.

Jesus is individualizing the message of God's Law for this young man's needs. Jesus isn't giving a standard for every Christian who follows Him to sell all their possessions and give to the poor, unless the accumulation of stuff for you is the same as for the rich young man, when all your 'good' stuff out values God's goodness, God's grace.

The problem we human beings, men and women, have is that a cursory review of the 10 Commandments can lead most any of us to say 'Teacher, all these I have kept'. Until those commands begin to be applied personally to each one of our situations. For example, I always like to just consider the very first commandment 'you shall have no other gods'. Well, obviously I don't practice 'open idolatry' such as Exodus 20 speaks about 'You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything ... you shall not bow down to them or worship them'. Well, I can say with the rich young man: I have kept this commandment. Until I hear Jesus' words of Matthew 10 'Anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me'. Jesus then gets to the heart of the matter, Jesus gets to my heart. First Commandment 'Put God first,' and I don't. I sin. I fail. And to give up my children and grandchildren for God is impossible for me. Disheartened and sorrowful, I must say I can't, and I won't do it.

The Law of God will always bankrupt us, because that is our self-righteous nature. Our Old Testament lesson from Amos shows us how nothing escapes God's attention. God knows our sins in every detail, 'For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins' says the Lord. That's what Jesus is exposing, you see, to this rich young man – his sin and his need for a Savior. But, most people prefer a Jesus who acknowledges their position in the community, what an upstanding citizen we are or civic leader we are, but instead Jesus confronts us as the gossips and slanders we are, the grudges we harbor, the cheap charity we actually offer.

People prefer a Jesus who would compliment us on our fidelity to hearth and home and family, but instead, Jesus confronts us with our family pride, our family dysfunction and failures, those secret thoughts and acts of unfaithfulness, those skeletons in the closet.

People prefer a Jesus who, like a ‘doting old grandpa’, winks at our sins and discretions and simply gives us what we want = stuff, more stuff. As we typically forget to receive His gifts with heart felt thanks.

III.

Jesus through His Word will always give us more than we expect. Certainly, He gives us the exposure and condemnation of God’s Law, but Jesus also wants to give us the awesome promises of God’s Gospel. So that we don’t become ‘disheartened and sorrowful, for we have great possessions’ also = we possess self reliance, self assurance, self promotion, self esteem, self righteousness, just plain self – ish-ness.

Jesus looks at the rich young man, we are told, and ‘loved him’... loved him even in his sin. Jesus looks at you and me right now, also, and He is loving us in our sin. That is the priceless promise of God’s Gospel. And the vantage point from which Jesus is looking at you and me in love is not from some self help TV talk show or through a media blitz selling you more stuff to be happy. Jesus is looking at you and me in love through the vantage point of His cross where we truly see that our God is good to us sinners. Upon the cheap wooden cross of Mount Calvary, our good God incarnate, Jesus, willingly paid the highest price of all, gave up His possession of all the glory of heaven to become our Savior, to pay our price.

Our lesson Mark 10 begins by saying ‘Jesus was setting out on His journey’. The very next chapter of Mark 11 tells us where Jesus’ journey was going – to Jerusalem, to the cross. In the cross of Jesus everything adds up, we sinners are in such eternal debt we can never pay it before God, we can give nothing to appease God in order to inherit eternal life. Not our stuff, not our merits, not our efforts, not our works, not even our sons and daughters, BUT Jesus who is our ‘good God’ has paid the price, vicariously for us crying out ‘It is finished’, it is paid in full. And through His bodily resurrection on Easter, Jesus gives us His gift, our true inheritance, eternal life, His promise of heaven filled with His stuff, filled with our sons and daughters = our loved ones who’ve gone before us.

Jesus required this rich young man to give up everything but he couldn’t do it and neither can we. But, Jesus did give up everything for us – Jesus gave up heaven to become human = for us, Jesus gave up His life unto death on the cross = for us, Jesus gave up death and the grave to conquer death and hell = for us. Jesus gave up His spirit to give us His Holy Spirit who gives us faith ‘firm to the end’.

Conclusion This rich young man came shopping for a bargain and at the check out line he certainly got a lot more than he bargained for, he received God’s Law and Gospel.

This rich young man wanted to pay the price for himself with just the right amount of information, some good advice, and uplifting pat on the back, an easy answer from Jesus.

This rich young man came with a cheap view of who Jesus is and what Jesus does. And instead of a pat answer and some life style advice, he got a drastic demand which revealed the condemnation and damnation of God's Law. And instead of some cheap advice for life improvement from a life style guru, he got the precious, precious, priceless love of Jesus his good God and Savior.

To inherit eternal life requires the sacrifice of absolutely everything, and I mean absolutely everything in our lives, which neither the rich young man nor any one of us can make, no matter how much you sell and give to the poor. But, when you're in that last check out line and I'm not talking about Kohl's, Walmart, Menards, or even Fleet Farm, but at death, and your account before God is added up, and you are in the hole of hell, your good God has some awesome good news. Jesus has paid your bill in full. Jesus has made that unlimited sacrifice for you which you can never make. You do not have go away disheartened and sorrowful, because you have the greatest possession of all, you have the good love of Jesus in Word and Sacrament. Priceless! Amen