

Sunday, October 14, 2012

***“Do you trust God enough?”***

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One of my favorite cartoons is one that I saw years ago in a magazine; I think it might have been The New Yorker or some similar magazine. The cartoon had a Priest standing at the church door after services, shaking hands with parishioners as they came out. As he shook their hands as they passed by, he kept repeating, “I didn’t mean you.” “I didn’t mean you.” “I didn’t mean you.”

If after today’s sermon you still think I didn’t mean you, I want to meet with you for an hour or so in my office because you know something that I would like to learn. That is because the proposition that forms the basis for today’s sermon is this: That we, you and I, we do not trust God like we should. Those who disagree with this proposition can stop listening now, because like I said, we will meet in my office some time later this week. For the rest of us, I will spend the next few minutes examining our situation and seeing what, if anything, we can do about it.

My proposition is that we do not trust God as much as we should. Which is to say, we do not trust God totally? This is sad because God wants better things for us than we can ask or imagine. Today’s Gospel is a good example. We read a man run up and knelt before Jesus. He ran up! He knelt before Jesus! This is a person on an urgent quest. “Good teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” I believe this man is entirely sincere; I base my belief on his reply to Jesus that he kept all of the commandment since childhood. The Gospel tells us, “And Jesus looking upon him loved him.” You see, Jesus also accepts his sincerity and Jesus has proven to be a pretty good judge of character. This man kneeling at Jesus’ feet is asking ultimate questions. Asking important questions! The Important Question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Our Lord wants this man to have what he wants. The man asked for it. Jesus loves him and will give him the answer. “You lack one thing, go sell what you own and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me”. The Gospel tells us that. “When he heard this he was shocked and he went away grieving for he had many possessions.” This man, who ran up to Jesus and publically knelt before him in the dirt asking him the ultimate question, is given the answer. But, he walks away because he had great possessions. He walked away because he did not trust Jesus enough.

Years ago, back in Louisiana, I participated in a program put together by the local Chamber of Commerce called, “Leadership St. Tammany”. It was by invitation only; leaders in the community were invited to learn about St. Tammany Parish from other leaders in the Parish. One of my

classmates in this program was Gregory, the Deputy Warden at St. Tammany Parish Prison. Over lunch one afternoon Gregory told us that the recidivism rate at the jail, the rate at which people return to criminal behavior and jail, that the recidivism rate is higher for drug dealers than for drug users. I found this counter intuitive; I thought that drug users would fall back into addiction and that the physical craving would drive them back into a life time of crime. Deputy Warden Gregory told us that the Parish Jail had programs to get the drug users clean and sober. People could get beyond their craving for alcohol, cocaine, meth, and heroin. However, the drug dealer’s addiction was mental, emotional, and spiritual. The drug dealer was addicted to a lifestyle. The drug dealer craved money, and the things money bought; the clothes, the jewelry, the cars, and the houses. Deputy Warden Gregory said that money became an addiction for the soul. The addiction for the dealer was much harder to overcome than the addiction for the user. Drug dealers wind up back in jail more often than drug addicts.

Jesus said, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God”. The issue for the rich man was his lack of trust in Jesus. After all Jesus, Jesus did not say give up your treasure. No, Jesus said swap your earthly treasurer for treasure in heaven. The rich man did not believe Jesus could deliver on eternal life or treasure in heaven. And so, the man decided to put his trust in his earthly wealth.

Jesus has consistently told us that he will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. It may seem to us impossible to get a camel through the eye of a needle. Jesus said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God.” Also, Jesus has consistently told us that he will give us better than what we can gain for ourselves. Jesus said “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mothers or fathers or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the good news who will not receive a hundred fold now in this age, houses and brothers and sisters, mothers, and children and fields, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.”

It all comes down to this: Do we trust God like we should? Can we make sacrifices now and believe that we cannot out give God? Do you believe that God will ignore the time you spend singing in the choir, working on the Altar Guild, cleaning up after men’s supper or loaves and fishes, any of the ministries here at Christ Church? Do you believe God will overlook your sacrifice? Do you trust that God will return to you more than the dollar you put in the alms basin? Do you think that in eternal life you will have given more than you received? And

yet we are afraid to give up what we have for fear we will lose everything.

I want to tell you a story, one of my favorite stories. The story is about an old man who lived his entire life on island of Crete. It is where he was born. It is where he fell in love and was married. It is where his children were born. It is where all his joys of life were celebrated. As he was about to die he asked that he be carried outside so that he could see his beloved island one last time. As he was about to breathe his last he reached down and clutched some of the earth of Crete in his hand, and he died happy.

When the old man arrived at heaven's gate he was welcomed by St. Peter who greeted him fondly and told him to come beyond the gates and into the joy of heaven. As the old man approached the gate of heaven, St. Peter saw the soil of Crete in the old man's hand. "Please," said St. Peter, "you must let go of the soil." "Never!" said the old man. Sadly, St. Peter entered heaven alone leaving the old man at the gate. Eons of time passed. Then, an old friend of the old man came out of heaven with a loaf of bread and jug of wine. They sat, talked, laughed, ate and drank. When the bread was eaten and the wine finished, the friend said to old man, "My friend, drop the soil of Crete and come with me into heaven." Again, the old man refused, "No Never!" Sadly, the old man's friend left him once more alone at the gate of heaven. More eons of time passed. This time the old man's granddaughter came out from heaven to play with her grandfather. "Oh, granddaddy" she said, "you are so wonderful and we miss you so much. Please, please come inside with me." This time the old man nodded. As he arose, he looked at the soil of Crete in his hand and slowly let it sift between his fingers until his hand was empty. He passed through the gate of heaven and the first thing he saw on the other side was the island of Crete.

God has wonderful things in store for us. More wonderfully these are exactly the things that we want and we need. Things we could never get for ourselves because these things will be eternal. The question is, "Do you trust God enough?" After everything God has done for you, after everything God has shown you, after all that Jesus said and did, after Jesus gave his life for you, the question is, "Do you trust God enough?"

If you ask God to help you with those leaps of faith that you cannot or will not make, the ones that seem impossible remember "all things are possible with God". All you have to do is ask; God will do the rest. The question is "Do you trust God enough?"

And yes, in this sermon, I mean you! Amen.