



The devil was on the prowl one day. And he was out to get the Christian. When the devil saw the Christian, he shot one of his fiery darts, and it struck the Christian smack in the chest. But - the Christian had on the breastplate of righteousness so no harm was done.

The devil next shot at the Christian's head. But – the Christian's head was protected by the helmet of salvation, so no harm was done. The devil figured everyone has an Achilles' heel, so he shot at the Christian's feet.

But – the Christian's feet were shod with the gospel of peace, so no harm was done. The Christian said a brief prayer of thanks, and turned around to walk away.

The devil fired an arrow into the Christian's wallet – and killed him.¹

Isn't it amazing how the questions, the attitudes, the problems, and the issues found in scripture are so often so incredibly modern. As Jesus is on his journey towards Jerusalem towards the cross, and towards resurrection, a man kneels at the feet of Jesus and asks what he thinks is the ultimate question.

What must I do to inherit eternal life?

The man thinks that it's all about something *he* can do.

Jesus picks up the conversation, perhaps something like this:

Well, let's see – you shouldn't kill anyone. ***Yeah – I got that. What else?*** And you're not supposed to cheat on your wife. ***Sure, sure – I'm not married anyway. I'm okay there.***

Sure – it's really not quite as simple as all that, but anyway – you're not to steal. I suppose that you've never stolen anything – right? ***I should say not. What's next?*** Some people have a bit of a problem with gossip. Any problems in that area? ***Oh, no, no. I never gossip about anyone.*** It's important that you not cheat anyone. ***Of course, of course. No need to do anything like that.***

And of course you are supposed to honor your father and your mother. Everything okay there? ***Honor my parents? Are you kidding? Of course I respect my parents – I've got the best parents in the world. You wouldn't believe how much money and property they've put in a trust fund for me! They are great. Just great. So – come on Teacher, I'm done all those things since I was a kid. Anything else?***

You may recall a phrase from the hymn by Brian Wren that I like so much: *fully loved, though fully known*²

Jesus knew everything – everything, about this rich, young, ruler.³ And Jesus loved him. Just like God knows everything – everything, about each one of us. And God loves each one of us.

Jesus knew him fully. Jesus loved him fully.

Jesus loved him far too much to let him think that amazing grace is cheap grace. Jesus looked him straight in the eye, straight into his heart, and said:

Go, sell, give, come, follow

Anything else, you ask? Well, you are missing one small point. You need to go back, sell everything that you own and give all the money to the poor. Then come on back, and follow me as one of my disciples.

Go, sell, give, come, follow

Well – there was no comeback from the would-be disciple. He thought that he could earn his way into heaven by virtue of his accomplishments – by virtue of his virtues.

He thought it was about something *he* could *do*.

It isn't about anything that we do.

It's not about doing anything. It's about being. It's about being transformed.

The man who knelt before Jesus and asked that question didn't need to do anything else. He needed to be transformed. He needed to be transformed from being rich. If he *had been* transformed from being rich – what would he have become? Poor? No – he would have become free. He would have become free from the trap that he was in.

Free from his belief that his good behavior could bring him, at the last, into God's nearer presence, if he only to find the right check list. Free from his life that – at its foundation - relied upon the accumulation of wealth, rather than in a relationship with God.

He made the outward signs of following the covenant found in the 10 Commandments. But when push came to shove, his possessions were more important than his relationship with God. He was not interested in a journey measured by the transformation of his life. He wanted a journey measured by the number of his accomplishments.

Our journey towards God is meant to be a journey of transformation.

As our relationship with God grows and matures, our lives will continually be transformed.

Many here today have chosen to experience a portion of our journey towards God together. Believing that we know God best of all within the context of relationships with other people, we form a parish family. As a family, our lives are transformed each time we pray together, and each time we welcome a stranger.

Our lives are transformed each time we sing together, and each time we kneel together at the communion rail with outstretched hands. Our lives are transformed each time we help a child understand that God loves him or her.

Every aspect of our life together provides an opportunity for transformation. And for many of us, this transformation includes our relationship with money.

All things come of thee, O Lord; and of thine own have we given thee.

We say those words each Sunday. More than words that say only on Sundays, these words are meant to provide a basis and foundation for our understanding that everything is a gift from God.

Our relationships and our friendships. Our skills and our talents. Our money. Do we think that we ‘own’ our friendships and our relationship? Or are they gifts – to which God calls us to be good stewards? Do we think that we ‘own’ our skills and our talents? Or are they gifts – to which God calls us to be good stewards?

Do we think that we ‘own’ the money and other resources we enjoy? Is our money something that enhances our journey of transformation towards God? Can we see our money and our possessions as gifts – to which God calls us to be good stewards.

Or like the rich, young, ruler in today’s Gospel, when push comes to shove, are we embarrassed into silence and turn away?

God does not call us to be embarrassed.
God does not call us to turn away in silence.

Fully loved, though fully known.

Just like the man in today’s gospel, Jesus looks at us, and loves us.

Jesus looks us straight in the eye and says come and follow me on this journey of transformation. What will our answer be?

¹ www.preachingpeace.org Pentecost 19 – October 11, 2006

² Hymn 603. *The Hymnal 1982*. Text: Brian Wren

³ Only Matthew calls him young, only Luke calls him a ruler, and only Mark implies that he is rich.