

Sermon: Selling Out**Scripture: Mark 10:17-31****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: October 11th, 2009**

In case you were wondering, I do not pick these passages! Divorce last week. Wealth this week. This is not a good way to go into a pledge campaign for the fall. In a couple of weeks we'll be asking you to give generously to the church while this week Jesus will be telling you that you should give everything you have to the poor. It seems a little problematic. I am suppose to encourage you to take the scriptures seriously and live the gospel faithfully, but if you were to take this seriously and live it faithfully, I would not have a job to tell you to take to this seriously and faithfully. So I'm in a bind.

And actually its not just me, it's our entire church that this places in a bind, because if we were to hear this scripture and take it seriously and many of us were to go off and sell all we have and give the money to the poor then we would obviously not have been able to raise the money we needed to put into this building repair that is going on now and it would eventually, bell steeple and all, come crumbling down around us.

So what are we to do with this scripture? Is this Bible just a quaint ancient writing that has some interesting things to say and within which we can find some wisdom here and there but for the most part its unrealistic and even irrational in its claims and expectations? Even the most literalist and fundamentalist interpreters of the Bible in our culture find a way to explain away why Jesus doesn't *really* expect us to take this literally and sell all we have. Of course Jesus means literally that you will go to Hell if you don't accept Him as savior but he doesn't literally mean sell all you have and give it to the poor! He was just talking to this man and making a point about how impossible is it is for a person to get into heaven under his own effort. Oh and when he says at a different point in the Gospel "only those who do the work of my father will enter into heaven", he must not really mean that because all you have to do is accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and your saved. You just gotta know what to take literally and what not to!

But that is just SO dishonest! And it felt to me as I sat down with this passage this week that it would be dishonest to say that Jesus didn't really mean for us to follow his advice to this young man and that really Jesus' point was something else, because, I'm not so sure that Jesus' point was anything but exactly what we have been saddled

with this morning. That those of us with wealth, and I think it would be pretty accurate to say that's everyone in this room this morning, are or can be easily trapped by our material possessions and our pursuit of material possessions such that we too would be unable to heed the voice of a higher calling, the voice of God, even if it came ringing loudly and clearly in our ears. I'm not saying that makes us bad people or that God doesn't love us as a result, the passage says clearly that Jesus loved the man, I'm just saying that what this passage seems to suggest is that wealth and material comfort and the pursuit of such wealth and material comfort and security can leave little time, energy and resources left over for the pursuit of spiritual wholeness.

That's what I think the passage suggests and I want to face it squarely and say there is no way I'm selling all I have, my guitar and snowboard and car, making my family destitute in pursuit of spiritual wholeness. Can't spiritual wholeness, the kingdom of God be pursued on the snow covered mountain and through making music and within a beautifully rebuilt sanctuary??!! No way. I'm not doing it. I'm not going to listen! And I really DO like those pay checks I get every two weeks so I hope you don't listen either! I mean do you think anyone across our wealthy country this morning sitting in church and listening to this scripture is really going to do it?!

Actually there was a rich man sitting in church in this country, not long ago, sometime in the 1960's, who had become a millionaire by the age of 29 through a mail order and publishing business and through real estate and he actually did do it. He had provided his wife and family with everything wealth could buy – a big house, a number of really nice cars, a second home on a lake, a large horse farm – and much to his great pride he worked 16 hour days such that his wife and two preschool kids hardly ever saw him. His wife expressed her dismay over their family that felt broken and only kept vaguely together by all the material possessions that kept them physically comfortable and easeful and in her own pain and emptiness she began having an affair which finally felt so bad to her that she left her family down in Alabama to seek guidance from a friend in New York City. The young rich man was stunned by her sudden absence and shaken to the core realizing just how important his wife was to him and their family together and whole. So he persistently called her for a number of days asking for her to see him if he were to come to New York and finally she relented saying that she really did want their

marriage to work. So the rich young man went to New York and that night they took a life changing walk that brought them down 5th Avenue and to the steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral where she spoke as she wept about her deep loneliness and the affair and how all their wealth meant nothing to her in the absence of the man that she wanted to spend her life with. She feared, in admitting the affair that he would simply walk away, but instead her husband sat on those steps as it began to rain and held her as they cried together. So much so that a stranger stopped and asked if he could help them in any way, which brought them back to the awareness of how they looked there in the pouring rain and so they hailed a cab. And it was in the backseat of that cab that the rich young man decided that God was giving him this amazing gift of a fresh start and they there and then decided before the ride was over that they would sell his interest in the big company that had made them all their money, and that they would sell their houses, their farm, their furniture and just about everything and give all the money to charity. Of course it didn't happen overnight, but neither did they wake up the next day and say "What were we thinking?!" Over the next weeks and months they liquidated their assets and remained determined to keep only the basics – some toys for the kids, some clothes, their car a few thousand dollars to tide themselves over until they could figure out, they said, what God would do with them next. Well, the story continues from there, but I'll just end it here by saying that this couple ran into some wonderful people of a similar ilk at an intentional Christian community called Koinonia where they were seeking to live the gospel in a faithful way together and eventually Linda and Millard Fuller felt called to start what is now one of the most well-known non-profits of all time - Habitat for Humanity.

And that's what happened when one rich young man sold all he had and gave it to the poor. May God give us the ears to hear and the courage to live our lives out of a higher calling. Amen.