

Date Preached

10-Oct-2021

Date Initiated

28-Sept-2021

Where Preached

SAK

Appointed Readings

Prop 23, Yr B

" '[G]o, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor,
and you will have treasure in heaven.' "



And so, once again, we come to one of those gospel lessons ... one of those teachings of Jesus ... that we'd just as soon not hear, thank you very much. From His embrace of lepers and the marginalized to His often-brusque teachings—such as, His curt "let the dead bury their own dead"—Jesus often does and says things that make us uncomfortable. Our Savior's love is infinite, but His lessons can be difficult to hear.

And perhaps more so than today's: "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God"—harder, in fact, than a camel's passing through the eye of needle. Wealth is—and *should* be—a difficult issue for us as Jesus' disciples, particularly in a culture, like ours, where financial success and material excess are badges of worthiness and objects of adulation. But we can't uncouple the camel-and-needle image from what precedes it; from its lead-up: A good man ... an honorable man ... a devoutly observant Jew whom Jesus loves (as St Mark tells us) asks how to get to Heaven. "The only thing you lack," Jesus tells the rich man, "is *nothing*: Divest yourself of your material wealth and give the proceeds to the poor." **Oh, is that all?**

Now, what I said a few weeks ago, both here and in the EPISTLE, about Jesus' teachings about cutting off our hands and feet and His inflexibility on the question of divorce holds here, as well. One of His favorite teaching techniques is hyperbole ... exaggeration to make a point. If Jesus can set us back on our intellectual or ethical heels, as it were ... if He can bowl us over with the extremity or forcefulness of His words ... then we are apt to heed them and consider their import for our own lives. Thus, the true thrust of Jesus' words today is not literally bankrupting ourselves to assist the poor—that's the didactic extreme—but rather, *sacrifice*: giving to and serving others *not* because we owe them a duty, but precisely because we *don't*.*

And here, we come to the second of the three fundamental actions of a family that we began exploring last week: *love*. Last Sunday, we talked about how our parish family *cares* for one another. Like a biological family, we, too, feed, nurture and support one another in myriad ways. Like the rich man's obeying all the laws of Moses, this is good and honorable; cause for celebration, even. But, Jesus says, doing only what we're required to do—whether by legal obligation or by familial relationship—isn't enough. In sacrifice, Jesus has freed us from the obligations of sin, but in the freedom He gives us ... in the very *absence* of obligation ... He calls us to sacrifice, as He did, through love: *sacrificial love*.

* Indeed, this is the structure of the 'set-up' in today's lesson. The man tells Jesus (Who believes him, by the way) that he follows all of the commandments: doesn't steal, honor your father and mother, etc. The man fulfills all of the duties the Law expressly imposes on him. "Good for you," Jesus says to him, in effect. "Now go out and do likewise to the poor. Not because you must—that is, because the Law commands it; but because you *should*—because it is what *I* would do."

In a nuclear family, sacrificial love might be, at one extreme, a spouse's tagging along on a ski vacation to please her partner, even though she herself doesn't like skiing. At the other extreme, sacrificial love might be a parent's working multiple jobs in order to help a child excel in a sport or music or art ... or get a better education. Maybe it's a grandparent's taking in a grandchild, or an adult child's taking in a parent who can no longer live alone. An opposite choice—the decision *not* to do any of these things—would not be immoral; would not run contrary to any legal or ethical obligation of *care*. But it might break Jesus' heart, because He calls us not to a life of law but of *love*; not of self but of sacrifice.

And what might such loving, servant sacrifice look like for *our* family ... our *parish* family? As a body gathered in Christ's name and image, what does it mean for us, as a parish, to "go, sell what [we] own, and give the money to the poor"?

- St Andrew's **loves** when we band together and sacrifice our time ... and a little bit of treasure ... to donate food to the Food Bank; to provide eggs and sneakers and school supplies to people outside our parish community in need of not just material but also emotional support.
- St Andrew's **loves** when we stage an elaborate Christmas Bazaar to raise thousands of dollars for our Mission and Outreach Commission to donate to worthy causes in Litchfield County and throughout the world ... and when vestry votes, as it does many years, to allocate additional monies to M&O from our annual operating budget.
- But sacrificial love is more than writing checks and going shopping. It's some members of our parish taking responsibility for the Torrington Soup Kitchen five or six Sundays a year. It's a new group looking at ways we can directly, and tangibly, address issues of food insecurity in the local community. And in a few weeks, I hope it will be a group of us going over to a park in Washington to find out how we can work with other churches to assist refugees who are moving into Connecticut from Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Opportunities for us to care for each other present themselves almost constantly; we needn't go looking for them. But the love-of-other our Savior calls us to? the sacrifices He wants us to make in His name to help those we're not obliged to? They're less obvious and more opportunistic. *We need* to go out and find them; pray and dream about them.

- How can St Andrew's be more active in climate care? in social justice? in helping children get quality education?
- What are the needs in Kent and New Milford and Torrington? Who doesn't have enough to eat? Who can't get to the doctor or afford to fill a prescription? Where are people languishing in loneliness or dying in despair?
- What additional resources are needed for displaced and homeless people? for immigrants and aliens? for victims of domestic violence? for people who suffer addiction?

As far as the *world* is concerned, we have no legal or social obligation to help any of these people, and turning a blind eye will keep our conscience clear. But as members of Christ's family, we live

every day under Jesus' injunction to go ... sacrifice and give. For, as a family, we show love by sacrificing ourselves—our '*selves*,' if you will—for others.

And so, as you're considering the amount of your pledge this stewardship season, I ask you to ponder the sacrificial love Jesus calls us to. Yes, consider it in terms of the amount of money you are willing to commit. Pray about the amount that, for you, will show not only that you care, but also that you love. And ... *also* ... think and pray about how your contribution, with all the others St Andrew's will receive, will reveal Jesus' love to the world, tangibly and materially. Embrace this moment as an opportunity for our family to unite in sacrifice; and love the world far beyond any duty we may have ... except the duty to love Christ as He loves us, which is immeasurably.



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