

SERMON  
Time after Pentecost – Lectionary 28  
October 11, 2009

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15  
Psalm 90:12-17  
Hebrews 4:12-16  
Mark 10:17-31

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ.

I heard this story of a man who was coming back from a business trip. He was flying first class and therefore received a complimentary dinner. He was a bit hungry, as he had missed lunch that day in order to attend a meeting so that he could catch an earlier flight home.

As dinner time arrived, the flight attendant, who had not been very pleasant, came around with the cart. She started passing out the pre-wrapped dinner trays that included a tossed salad.

When he peeled back the wrapping on his salad, he was met with a surprise. There, on top of the mixture of lettuce and carrots and what have you, lay a big fat dead cockroach. Understandably, he immediately lost his appetite.

He was quite angry about the whole incident and decided to write a scathing letter to the president of this particular airline. A couple of weeks later, he was surprised to receive a special delivery package in the mail. Lo and behold, it was a letter from the president of the airline. Contrary to his own letter, this letter was dripping with apology.

The president informed the passenger that the particular plane on which he had flown had been taken out of service. He told him that it had been completely stripped down and treated for bugs.

He also told him that the flight attendant would most certainly be reprimanded. And he ended the letter by appealing to the passenger to continue to use this airline.

As the man finished reading the letter, he noticed that there was another page clinging to the back his letter. You see, the secretary had made a grave mistake.

He pulled it apart and read these scrawled words that came from the hand of the airline president. They were directed to the secretary. They said: "Send this guy the standard 'roach' letter."

Here was a man who wanted some answers. Perhaps that airline president had the right intention. As a matter of fact, if that second page hadn't been attached, the man may have believed that the airline was sincere in addressing the problem.

He might have thought that the airline was genuinely concerned about customer service and customer satisfaction. But that was not the case. We would all agree that this customer deserved better, and should have gotten more than the standard "roach" letter.

Much of the time life seems to be like an endless series of questions. And sometimes we feel that all we get are "roach" answers.

Modern society has produced a complex life style, with complex issues, complex concerns, complex questions, and yes, complex answers. And answers are what we are all looking for. We want to know how, why, when, what, and where.

However, I believe that something must have happened to my generation. Indeed, we seem to be looking for answers, yet we seem to be afraid of finding the answers. We are afraid of committed relationships. When we do enter into a relationship, we are afraid that it won't work out.

We're afraid that we'll never get that "good" job. And then, when we do get it, we're afraid that we will lose it.

We're afraid of failure. We're afraid of success. We're afraid of dying young and we're afraid of growing old. We're afraid of things staying the same and we're afraid of change. We're afraid to take risks, we're afraid to step out in faith.

Therefore, because of all of our fears, we get all stressed out and burned out. We then start looking for the quick fix. What is it that we can do to fix our problems with the least amount of time, effort and money?

There is a product that has become quite the phenomena in our culture. It is sold in stores throughout the country if not the world. This product is called "duct tape". When I was younger I always thought it was called "duck tape". I didn't even know what a duct was.

But boy this tape was great. It could fix just about anything. I used it to put over a crack on my bicycle seat. My buddy and I used it to put our whiffle ball back together when it came apart. That was great because then it would fly farther.

It also works great for leaking tennis shoes. If you could name it, then duct tape could probably fix it; at least temporarily. As a matter of fact, duct tape will probably be holding together my box that I will be sleeping in tonight at the "Out of the Box" event for Family Promise.

You see, that's what the man in our Gospel story this morning is looking for. He falls on his knees in front of Jesus and says; "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He was looking for the quick fix.

But first of all, he must have known that something was broken in his life. On the surface, he had everything. We are told that he had many possessions.

Because of that he was considered to have been richly blessed by God. He would have had power and authority over others. People would have respected him.

It seems that he was also a good and faithful person. He had obeyed all of God's laws since his birth. Wow, that's impressive! How could life be any better for this man?

But evidently, something was missing. He didn't feel that he was whole. He felt that he was still lacking something.

Have any of you ever felt that way? You have a good job, or had a good job and are now retired. You are financially secure. You are in a meaningful relationship. You have great friends and a loving family. Yet you feel that there is still something missing? You can't put your finger on it, but you feel a certain sense of emptiness from time to time. And you can't seem to make it go away.

So this man comes to Jesus expressing in so many words, this sense of emptiness that he is feeling. Jesus tells him to keep the commandments. "Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not say false things about your neighbor; do not defraud; and honor your father and mother."

"No problem", the man said, "I have obeyed these since I was born." "Hurry up and tell me what else I need to do to guarantee my eternal life." Or another way to translate this phrase is, "what else do I need to do to give me eternal happiness". Again, the man is lacking something and can't quite understand what it might be.

So Jesus looked at him and loved him. Let's stop right there. Jesus looked at him and loved him. Did you ever wonder why he loved him? Was it because he was trying so hard to be a good and faithful person? Was it because he had many possessions? Was it because Jesus felt sorry for the man because he just did not get it?

And how did the author who was telling this story know that Jesus loved him? Is it because he believed that Jesus loves everybody and just decided to say it about this person? Maybe it was because Jesus was on a journey to the cross where he will suffer and die for this young man?

To be honest, we don't know. All we know is that we are told that Jesus loved him.

And then Jesus said; "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

This was not the quick fix this rich young man was looking for. This was something that he could not just take out his checkbook and take care of. This was a long term commitment. This was an invitation to change his life in a radical way.

You see, many times we miss the beauty of this story because we focus on this young man's wealth. We focus on what he had that he needed to get rid of. Perhaps what we need to ask is what it was that he didn't have that he needed.

Like the airline passenger I told you about in the beginning. What he did have was the standard "roach letter". What he didn't have was peace and satisfaction that his words were really being heard and taken seriously.

So what was the one thing that this young rich man lacked? What he lacked is that he does not lack. For this man is possessed – but only by his possessions. And Jesus is offering to free him from his possession, to cure him of his excess.

You see, Jesus is offering to fill that void – that sense of emptiness that troubles this man's soul. Jesus is offering him life and healing. It is offered as a free gift of grace. It did not require the man to "do" anything else, just receive the gift.

If you really think about it, the question; “What must I do to inherit eternal life” is a flawed question. The flaw is this: There is nothing we can do that will guarantee our entrance into the Kingdom of God. Entrance into the Kingdom of God is determined not by what we do, but rather by what Christ has done for us.

All we can do is receive what has already been granted. And that’s the good news that this young man did not understand. He wanted to “do”; “what must I do” he asks. He didn’t want to receive.

Remember last week when Jesus talked about becoming like little children in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? Children know that they are dependent; they cannot do many things for themselves. Therefore, they are able to receive gracefully.

The author Max Lucado once put it this way in envisioning what Jesus might say to this young rich man: “What you want costs far more than what you can pay. You don’t need a system, you need a Savior. You don’t need a resume, you need a Redeemer.

God does not save us because of what we have done. Only a puny god could be bought with tithes. Only an egotistical god would be impressed with our pain. Only a temperamental god could be satisfied by sacrifices.

Only a heartless god would sell salvation to the highest bidders. And only a great God does for his children what they cannot do for themselves.”

This is the good news for us here today. This is the answer we so desperately seek. There is nothing we can DO that will make God love us any more than he already does. The rich young ruler did not want to hear this.

But for those of us who will open our hearts and our minds, the invitation is given. Follow me. Our debt has been paid in full through the suffering and death of Jesus, who is our hope and our life. Amen.

May the peace that passes all understanding be with you now and for life everlasting.  
Amen.

## CHILDREN'S SERMON

Have any of you ever been shopping? Where do you go shopping, do you have a favorite store?

How do you decide if you can buy something or not? *Price*

Everything has a price, doesn't it?

Let's see if we can find out how much things cost. How about this shirt, these shoes, the candles on the altar? How about the donuts in the fellowship hall?

Let's look at the price of some other things. How about your smile? What about your mom and dad, how much would they cost? Or maybe a close friend?

There are some things that you can't buy no matter how much money you have.

In our Bible story today, there was a man who had lots of money. He wanted to know how he could get to heaven. Jesus told him that he could never buy his way into heaven, but instead it was a free gift from God. All he had to do was follow Jesus and make Jesus more important than all of his money. Isn't that good news?

I bet that most of you don't have much money. But that doesn't matter when it comes to God's love for us.

The best things in life don't cost any money. Things like moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas, friends, happiness. You can't buy those things at Walmart. But most of all God's love doesn't cost us anything, because Jesus already bought it for us when he died on the cross.

Let us pray.....