

Time after Pentecost – Lectionary 28
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Sunday, October 11, 2009
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

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

What do you do when you realize that you cannot break free from the prison you have put yourself in?

This afternoon a group from Trinity will be venturing out to Dauphin County Prison. Once they arrive, there will be a series of inspection points that they must pass through. Passing each checkpoint means another barred door closing behind them before a new one opens in front of them. Prison is a lonely and destructive place. The group literally breaks into the prison carrying the Good News with them.

The rich man in the gospel lesson this morning while not imprisoned by walls and bars, was a prisoner just the same.

How could he let money and possessions rob him of his freedom? The same way we do today!

The rich man seems to have everything, and yet he goes away shocked and grieving. Can you relate to his loneliness and despair?

I can relate thinking back to running a small business.

Our home maintenance business cards were printed and at the bottom read the words, “Call today for a free estimate.”

The niche we wanted to fill was to perform the small jobs for the average homeowner, and slowly the calls began to come in as word spread that we were punctual and hard working.

“Call today for a free estimate” became an invitation to meet new people and perform work within the community.

After a year or so, business began to really pick up and we found we could charge customers more money. And without noticing, the pleasure of meeting new people changed.

Our attitude turned into how much money we can make on the next call. Gone was the pleasure of meeting new people and fulfilling a need to the average homeowner. What came next was the realization that there is only a limited amount of hours in a day. The work and the desire for more money, meant more time away from home, wife, and kids.

The more time was spent away the more imprisoned I became.

The rich man in our gospel lesson was imprisoned too. Do you feel imprisoned? You don't have to have a small business, many possessions, or be in jail to experience the type of imprisonment I am speaking of. It can come from addictions.

The rich man comes to Jesus. But how do we learn about such teachings? You see there was another point about my life during the home maintenance era that I am not proud of.

This was my admitted belief that church was not much good for me. My problem came from the belief that the church was always asking for money. They were always passing that plate around for a hand-out. Hey, I worked hard for my money and it belonged to me.

Money became another prison keeping me from Jesus' teaching and a church home.

My situation was very similar to the rich man's. I wanted no part of giving my money away, so I took myself and the little money I had and did life and spirituality on my own.

Just as the man went away grieving after Jesus' words, I also was coming home grieving. Coming home to a dark house where everyone was asleep. Another day in their lives was lost. You know you can't get that time back! Then something began to happen that I can only explain now.

Slowly and methodically, a burden was being placed upon my back. Invisible to the eye, but there nonetheless, and a day off or money in my pocket did not remove it.

The burdens were guilt and failing relationship. Guilt from becoming so money centric and guilt of being away from home so much.

I went around grieving. Thank God I had a childhood that included church and Sunday school! I had a memory of prayer, and in my grief I prayed.

Have you ever made a deal with God?

Well, that is what I did. I prayed, "God if you can get the family and I out of here and away from the mess I have made of my life, I will find a church family."

And you know what God delivered!

God then removed the burden of my sin because God does not give up on those who hit rock bottom. And neither should we as Christ followers. What do you have to give up in order to follow God?

We all have that "thing" that keeps us a prisoner in our lives.

It is that one thing that comforts us, and protects us and we feel we could never give it up. What is it for you? Don't you know that God knows and God loves you anyway?

Jesus knew that the man would not give up his comfortable possessions and follow Jesus. But Jesus felt love for him (vs. 21). Why would it be different for you?

Jesus proclaimed his price: GO, SELL, GIVE, and FOLLOW!

God knows that we cannot give up the things that are blocking God's full love for us. God knows, but do we know? The disciples didn't know, they looked at each other greatly astounded and said, "Then who can be saved?"

Jesus says to them and to us, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." What is the one thing that imprisons you?

You can't break free alone, but with God you can. For God all things are possible.

My view of church has obviously changed from when I was 20 something! The plate is passed around to pay for the church's ministry. Pastors preach stewardship necessities to free each of us from money imprisonment. We now realize that when people give money to an important mission we connect with people in community.

But now I have to be mindful of another area in which learning occurred. An area that would have gone unrecognized without the teaching I have received from our pastors and lay teachers.

Peter alerts us to human sin when he says to Jesus, "LOOK! We have left everything and followed you." Humility remains the key for Jesus' teaching. Claiming status over others by way of riches is as wrong as claiming status over others by alerting everyone to see how much you have left to follow Jesus.

What must I do to inherit Eternal life? Who can be saved? So what do you do when you realize you cannot escape from the prison you have put yourself in?

Well, find a church family and be a follower of Christ...and... "Call today for a free estimate."

Amen.