

Well rich

11 10 15

O God, forasmuch as without you
we are not able to please you:
mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit
may in all things so direct and rule our hearts.

Our text may be found in today's reading from Mark, chapter 10 and verse 21:

'Come, follow me.'

If last week, job's riches, his exceptional wealth, were one of the signs of God's favour, then today, we have a challenge to the health and wealth gospel in Mark's account of the rich, young ruler.

The meeting between Jesus and this young man is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Luke tells us he was a ruler – a man in authority. Matthew tells us he was a young man. But it is Mark who demonstrates his youth and his enthusiasm by telling us that he actually runs up to Jesus and kneels at his feet to ask him a hard question that all good Jews at that time were passionately interested in: **'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life ?'**

Now, to our ears as Christians, the question simply means, 'How on earth do we get to heaven ?' But to this Son of the Law – Bar mitzvah – it means how can he guarantee by how he behaves, by how he keeps the commandments of the Torah,

that he will ensure that not only is he alive in this present age but that he will be alive in the age to come – the golden age when the coming of the Messiah will restore peace and prosperity to a fallen world ?

Jesus points him to the commandments, citing six – five from the Ten Commandments and one from Leviticus 19 and verse 13:

- You shall not murder.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness.
- You shall not defraud.
- Honour your father and mother

One positive – the respect of one's parents: five negative – don't kill, lie, steal, commit adultery or defraud people. Now only Mark cites this commandment from Leviticus and I wonder why all three gospels omit the tenth commandment not to envy. Essentially, the young man is so rich that he never has to envy anyone anything because he can afford to buy whatever his heart desires. On the other hand, being well rich, he has plenty of opportunities to behave with less than financial propriety.

What I love about this passage is Jesus' humanity. He's modest; he's loving; he has a sense of humour. He's modest because when the young man flatters him by addressing him as 'Good teacher', Jesus points him away from himself to the God that he is seeking – for only God himself is truly good – good or what ?

He's loving because faced with the young man's enthusiasm and desire to do good, to be better, Jesus' heart goes out to him. Mark alone tells us that '**Jesus looking at him loved him**' – sweet or what ?

He has sense of humour. Faced with the disciples' astonishment that the rich will find it well nigh impossible to get to heaven, Jesus offers us a ridiculous picture of a camel trying to pass through the eye of a needle – funny or what ? Okay, I do know that there is a small, narrow gate into the city of Jerusalem that a camel, laden with goods, could not pass through but the image still makes me smile.

So the story of the rich young ruler offers us a challenge – do we, individually, need to give up our personal wealth ? Some people have on hearing the challenge but I do believe it is a individual challenge rather than one that applies to us in general. But the challenge which is universal is our text today, '**Come, follow me.**'

And, as ever, my question to you to me to us is how best we should do so.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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