

Proper 23b: 10/14/18  
The Rev. Dee Anne Dodd  
St. Paul's, Wallingford CT

You heard the story.

A rich man rushes toward Jesus and asks,

“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus replies, on cue, with a streamlined version of the Ten Commandments.

The man can scarcely wait to declare that he has a perfect score.

Give him a big gold star!

But then Jesus ups the ante, telling the man he lacks 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.”

Interesting that Jesus should look at the rich man and see what he lacks.

But Jesus has something that will fill what's lacking in that man.

*Jesus, looking at him, loved him.*

I've heard it said that the man's problem is not his wealth,  
but his priorities or attitude about wealth;  
that it's what he does with his money, not the money itself.  
These are good points (I've preached them myself.)

But today I'm thinking that this man's real problem  
may be one he shares with many of us:

It's hard to fathom just how much Jesus loves us,  
how much he has in store for us,  
and how eager he is for us to follow him, closely.

What could we ever have to contribute to so great a cause?

How could we possibly be worthy?

Deep down, we know we don't deserve it.

Even the rich and presumably successful man there in front of Jesus  
is haunted by self-doubts.

Making sure Jesus knows he's there.

Making sure Jesus knows what a “good boy” he's been,  
showing off that gold star,  
checking off those commandments  
trying to earn God's love.

But Jesus already does love him – and us – too much to be impressed.  
 Jesus isn't impressed by any of our gold stars.  
 He doesn't expect us to save the world; he'll take care of that.  
 Jesus just wants us to know how much we're loved and,  
 by God's grace, how much we have to give.

That's the great challenge for the man in today's gospel, or any of us –  
 that our stuff, however modest, however defined,  
 can blind us from seeing *how much we need Jesus*  
*AND how much we are needed by Jesus.*

One of the most amazing things of all  
 is how readily Jesus – God in Christ himself – admits his need.

God so loved the world that he couldn't help but express that love.  
 God Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth,  
 needed to express the divine love so chose to give his only Son.  
 And throughout his earthly life that Son, Jesus,  
 devoted himself, completely, to sharing God's love with all creation.

Jesus looks and loves . . .  
 the rich man in today's gospel,  
 the motley crew of his disciples,  
 everyone he encounters along the winding path of his life,  
 every single one of us.  
 Everyone. Period. No exceptions.

Isn't that what we long for,  
 what we need most?  
 We probably don't need more stuff, or even much more money.  
 We do want and need to know that we are wanted and needed.  
 That we're valued, just as we are.  
 That we're loved, pure and simple, without condition.

I guess it all comes down to the riches of God's grace.

Years ago, I had some friends move into the parish of a priest  
 who was a mentor of mine.

He ended up paying them a pastoral visit.  
I couldn't wait to hear how it went.

"Oh, we had a lovely visit," my friends said.  
"But then after he left we realized that he never asked us to pledge."  
"Doesn't he *want* us in his parish?" they wondered. "Don't they *need* us?"

Yes, you heard correctly.  
Their feelings were hurt because this very fine priest  
didn't do as Jesus did in today's gospel:  
He didn't ask them to give up some money.

I assure these were not what you would consider "wealthy" people.  
They were at the time a young couple who'd just bought their first home  
and, oh yes, were about to have triplets.  
I can't imagine they were any less concerned about money than any of us.

Yet what they wanted most was for someone from church  
to look at them, love them,  
and invite them to belong.  
To ask them to pledge, make a monetary commitment  
to support a particular faith community trying to follow Jesus together.

Well, consider yourself asked.

Yes, regardless of the gospel lesson,  
this is stewardship season in the church and, yes,  
we have been busy preparing the stewardship mailing  
you should be receiving later this week.  
And if for some reason you don't, we'll have a copy waiting here for you.

So, sure, in a practical sense, consider yourself asked  
to give generously of your money to this parish  
(and to other worthy causes and charities dear to your heart.)  
Consider yourself needed,  
just as you, deep down, *need* to give.  
Consider yourself looked upon and loved.

*Amen.*

