

## Twenty-eighth Sunday – October 11, 2015

It's easy to miss a significant moment in today's gospel. The young man has just informed Jesus that he has lived a decent moral life right from his youth. Jesus is taken with his candor and grace, and the gospel pointedly records, "Jesus, looking at him, loved him." And then, no pat on the head, no "well done." Instead, "Go sell what you have and give to the poor." Instead of effusive praise, Jesus is saying: "Because I love you, I'm telling you this."

It's an old posture many of us have used many times. "If I didn't love you I wouldn't care so." "No, you can't go out tonight; you have homework to do." "I can't let you do this to yourself."

Why all these imperatives? You know why: because if you love someone you want what is best for them. You can't just stand by and let them settle for less. If you didn't care, then let them go jump in the lake. But you do care. Jesus loves this young man too much to let him settle for just being "a good man." "Hey," says Jesus, "you can do better than that."

Jesus is speaking to us, we begin to see; and that's the teaching of today's gospel. We're good people, decent and hard-working. But we, too, can do better than what we are doing. So this gospel, as we begin to suspect, is not a story only about money. If it were only about money, then we could all buy our way into heaven. But none of us can do that no matter where we stand on the economic ladder. The Kingdom of God is not for sale. The poor cannot buy it with their poverty any more than the rich can buy it with their wealth. The Kingdom of God is gift. And here's the catch for that young man, and perhaps for us too.

We've got to be free to receive the gift. We can't be otherwise engaged. We can't be so tied up or so tied down that we can't respond. We can't accept God's gift if we have no spare hand to take it. We can't follow if we're not free to go.

That's why the rich young man went away sad, if you ask me. He understood all at once that he was not free. His possessions were supposed to make him free, but, kneeling there in front of Jesus he realized it was not so. He could not believe that the opposite of rich might not be poor, but free.

I'm not sure why Jesus' disciples were so amazed by all this. After all, they had walked away from all they held dear to follow Jesus. He called, and nothing else seemed all that important anymore. He set them free, that's all. It was not their doing. It was his gift.

I know; I know. The children, the mortgage, the aging parents, the prescription drugs and doctor's bills, the insurance, the economy, the uncertain future. There are days when threading a camel through a needle's eye seems easier than following Jesus. Too often, we hear of good, dedicated disciples succumbing to weariness, frustration and burnout. So, who can be saved? And who stands brave enough to be free? The question has not changed much, but neither has the answer. For us it is impossible, but not for God. For God, all things are possible.