

Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

'And the Lord was setting out on his journey.'

+INJ+

A man, a young man, runs up and kneels before Our Lord, beseeching Him: *'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'*

The Lord answers: *'Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honor your father and mother.'*

'Hate evil, and love righteousness, establish justice at the gates.' *'Seek good, and not wickedness, that you may live.'*

These all God commanded in the ancient past; through Moses and the prophets was such righteousness laid upon the people of The Lord.

And the young man is of the people of The Lord; from youth, his ear has been bent toward the voice of Moses and the great witnesses of the eternal divine will. So he answers: *'All these I have kept from my youth.'*

'And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and follow me."'

A strange instruction, for never was it before ordained by God that man should forsake all his earthly life and being. Such was not demanded through Moses. Such was not enjoined by the prophets, nor required by the wisdom of the Proverbs.

The young man hears Christ's command. The young man leaves, *'for he had great*

possessions.'

What do you make of this event of the Gospel?

Some say that the man is consumed by the arrogance of his self-righteousness; he seeks to justify himself, and beckons Our Lord to hear what more he can do to earn his salvation by his own works.

Others say that he truly does not desire to do God's will, for he is unwilling to part from his created comforts in order to follow Jesus.

And all assume that he disregarded the words of The Lord, and returned to his wealth.

I tell you now, he did not *'go away sorrowful'* because he refused to listen to Jesus. He *'goes away sorrowful'* because he intends to do exactly what The Lord has commanded him.

For see that he does not question Christ as did the scribes; nor is he testing Jesus with malevolent questions as did the Pharisees. He runs up to the Lord, and reverences him upon his knees. He asks what he must do, for he *'seeks first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.'*

From the days of his youth, the young man has honored the precepts of his ancestors; he has revered the God who delivered his bloodline out of the slavery of Egypt, who raised up men of understanding to shepherd his fathers.

He is not gloating. He is not putting on airs. He is in earnest, and asks in earnest, *'What must I do?'*

The Lord does not rebuke him as he does the Pharisees, who *'do justice to be seen by others.'* Christ does not chastise him as he does the disciples, who *'dispute as to who is the greatest.'*

He is not condemned as a *'brood of vipers'* nor damned as *'a white washed tomb.'*

Rather, it is written: *'Jesus, looking at him, loved him.'*

'Jesus loved him' for Jesus would have him become one of his followers. '*Jesus loved him*' because in him is found '*religion, pure and undefiled.*'

Now see it is written: '*He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*' If he had despised the Lord's instruction, he would not have gone away *in sorrow*, but rather would have left in indignation. If he had rejected the Lord's saying, he would not have been *disheartened*, but rather outraged.

He sorrows, *for he had great possessions*. And hearing Our Lord's voice, he will obey; in great sorrow, he will '*sell all that he has, and give it to the poor,*' and *follow Jesus*.

But who, then, can follow Jesus? Who, then, will trace His steps into the courts of the ungodly? Into the palaces of the heathen? Who will bear the scorn of liars in the midst of Jerusalem, and the cutting of the scourge upon the pavement of Judea? Who will carry with Christ the sin of all mankind out through the gates of the Holy City, and with guiltless blood expiate the guilt of human evil? Who will '*take up his cross*' and follow Jesus?

'*On the night in which he was betrayed*' Our Lord is betrayed with a kiss, and arrested at the point of blades of cold iron, that He might walk the way of His Passion.

Where He goes,
none may follow. So it is that the disciples are scattered.

Where He goes,
none may follow. So it is that St. Peter thrice denies his Lord.

Where He goes, none may follow; So it is that those who had been healed by Christ spew forth curses in place of praise against the Son of Man.

Where He goes, none may follow, for Our Lord must suffer alone.

It is not merely the disciples who cannot bear to follow their Lord. It is not merely Peter who cannot endure the accusations of the mob. It is not merely the once joyful crowd that cannot *drink of the cup of which the Son of Man must drink*.

'For [in the garden] there was a young man.' A young man who was '*following Jesus*'. A young man who had *sold all that he had, and given it to the poor.*' A

young man *'possessing nothing but a linen cloth about his body.'*

'And the soldiers seized him, but he left the linen cloth, and ran away naked.'

For Our Lord must suffer alone.

Jesus is taken. He is tortured and mocked. His hands are nailed to a cross; a spike is driven into His feet; His brow is adorned with a crown of thorns; His blood pours upon the cursed ground, upon the ground of the mount called The Skull, that the lifeless mouth of the blighted earth might be opened; that the voice of the innocent blood of Our Lord might cry out to heaven, *'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'*

The heavens and the earth are passing away, dear Christians. The New Heavens and the New Earth are at hand.

For Our Lord *will come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead.*

Though you, sinful and weak, cannot follow Him to the cross; you will follow Him to the grave. And through the portal of death, you will be cast before the judgment seat of the Son of God *in His kingdom, which shall have no end.'*

There, the angelic scribe shall open the scroll of all the works of man, and your sins will be pronounced before all the heavenly host. Then, you will tremble, as the angel opens a new book wherein to write the acts of the Lord Jesus; You will dread as the angel draws out the pen with which to transcribe the conversation between you and the Christ upon the throne of His judgment. And as it is written, *you shall give an account of yourself to God, what you have done.*

The Lord waits for you to speak. The angel diligently puts his pen to paper. And in despair, you cry out, *'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'*

On that day, you shall hang your head and weep; Christ shall descend from His throne, and with His pierced hand lift up your chin; and the angel shall smile as he turns his face to the great book, and records with imperishable ink what he sees:

'And Jesus, looking at the man, loved him.'

+INJ+

Preached by Pastor Fields

*Sermon Texts: Psalm 90:12-17; Amos 5:6-7,
10-15; Hebrews 3:12-19; Mark 10:17-22.*