

18 Pentecost 2003  
"You Lack One Thing"  
The Rev. Thomas W Simmons IV

This morning we're doing things a little differently. For the sermon time I want to do two things. Tom Coate and I want to report to you from our journey to Dallas last week, so I'll preach a short homily now, with our report afterward.

Our Gospel lesson this morning introduces us to a familiar character: the rich young man. And Jesus comes through his town teaching and the young man feels a tug in his heart. Listening to Jesus he senses something missing in his life.

He's wealthy, but he's discovered that his possessions don't satisfy. He gets tired and bored with them. He's religious in a moral sort of way, but he's found that something's missing there, too. **So he turns to Jesus.**

He asks what he must do to inherit the eternal life Jesus promised. When Jesus answered him, Mark tells us the young man was "shocked" by the answer and the disciples were "perplexed" and "greatly astounded." That's interesting. What did Jesus say to him?

Mark tells us that Jesus looked at the young man and loved him. He was a great guy. He was wealthy, with lots of money and really neat toys. He was a good Jew, obeying the commandments: you shall not murder, steal, bear false witness, or defraud, and you shall honor your father and mother. **He had it all, except...**

Jesus said, "You lack one thing. Go, sell what you own, give the money to the poor, then come and follow me." Mark tells us that, "When he heard this he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions." .....Just let that hang in the air. "Go, sell what you own, give the money to the poor, then come and follow me." That's heavy isn't it? He found it shocking.

I have a question. What's the "one thing" the young man lacked? Was it faith? Perhaps he put his faith in his possessions to make him feel good, to give him security, identity and purpose in the world. Maybe he's built his life on these things and cannot conceive of life without them. He can't envision entrusting his life in *God's* care. He can't imagine in any practical way that God could provide him with security, identity and purpose in life.

That's easy to imagine isn't it? I think we can all relate to the lad's lack of faith because we have a hard time imagining it ourselves. Jesus tests the man's faith by asking if he could **trust Jesus enough to lose it all and follow him.** He's testing us in the same way. What would happen if you lost it all? Could you give it all up and trust God in its absence? God help us.

**But did you hear Jesus' promise to his disciples?** "There is no one who has left house or family or fields for my sake who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age and in the age to come eternal life." He promises so much more to us if we'll just trust him for it. So maybe the "one thing" he lacked was faith...*or maybe its something else.*

**Was it love?** That's a compelling possibility, too. Perhaps the guy loved his possessions too much. He loved his money and the things it could buy. He loved his stuff so much that he ended up loving it more than anything else.

Yes, Jesus is a "good teacher" BUT does he love Jesus in a way that would lead him to forsake all to follow him? Sure, he obeys the commandments, BUT notice he lists only the last six commands that deal with our duty toward others. He doesn't cite the first few commands, which direct us **to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind**. And yeah, he's proper and nice to people, BUT does he love his neighbor enough to sacrificially help them, to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor"?

This young man, whom Jesus loved, went away grieving because his answer to each of these questions was "no." It's really quite sad. God help us.

But did you hear Jesus' promise to his disciples? When they heard all this they "were greatly astounded and said to one another, 'Then who can be saved?'" You see, Jesus is setting such a high standard, such a radical calling, such an impossible goal that **shows us how utterly helpless we are**, how entirely we need God's help.

Mark tells us that Jesus looked at them - can you imagine that look? - and said, "For mortals it IS impossible, but not for God; for God ALL THINGS are possible." That's good news, if you feel the pointed point of Jesus' words, and maybe the shock and grief that go with it. That's good news if you want to follow Jesus like that rich young man, but feel unable to do what he calls you to do.

The good news is that though we are entirely unable to be the men and women and boys and girls he calls us to be, God is at work in us, and for him all things are possible. **He can change you, transform your faith and love and desires.** He can make you the person he wants you to be.

You just need to get on your knees and ask him, every day. Let's close with my favorite prayer. AMEN