



28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR B

In the name of the Father +, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

How long does it take you to pack when you're going on holiday? If you're anything like me, it will take quite a while: firstly, you have to decide what you think the weather's going to be like, so you take enough suitable clothes for any eventuality; secondly, you pack all the toiletries you need; then you pack a few books and some entertainment so that you don't get bored on the 'plane. Then, when you try to shut the suitcase, and realise you can't because you've packed too much, you have to start taking out what you don't really need, so that you're left with only the essentials for your trip. All of us think we need a great deal more than we actually do, but the best way to travel is to travel light, and if you need anything else, buy it when you reach your destination.

This idea of travelling light gives us a glimpse into what Jesus was talking about in this morning's Gospel reading. The rich young man who came to Jesus was a devout Jew: he practised faithfully the Jewish Law, and lived his life according to the commandments to love God and his neighbour as himself. With those qualifications, you would have thought that he would have been praised by Jesus for being devout and religiously upright: but, no. Jesus is able to identify in that young man what is getting in his way of living out the Law even more perfectly: that piercing stare of Jesus looked right into that young man's soul and saw the one thing that he lacked. Jesus said to him, 'Go and sell everything you own and give your money to the poor, and then you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' By his words, Jesus shows that he has identified that it is the young man's wealth that is stopping him from becoming a disciple. The man's face fell, and he went away sad. The words of Jesus resonated within that man's heart, and he realised that his wealth was the one thing he couldn't give up, even to follow Jesus. This must have caused him great sadness, and, hopefully, caused him to re-evaluate his situation. That young man's trouble was that he had too much excess baggage: his wealth was getting in the way of his discipleship, as Jesus so astutely identified.

Each one of us carries excess baggage: the sinful habits, that weigh each of us down, get in the way of our relationship with, and discipleship of, Jesus. Each one of us, if we're honest, can identify areas in our own lives where we hear the teaching of Jesus, and of the Holy Scriptures, and we go away sad, because our lives, and our behaviour, are very far from what they are called to be. We hear the words of Jesus, and we don't allow ourselves to be changed by them; we often find the Scriptures uncomfortable, especially when they challenge the way we are living, when they bring our sinfulness to light, and prick our consciences. This is why we should never just read the bits of Scripture and Jesus' teaching that are comfortable and do not challenge us. As we heard from the reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, 'The word of God is alive and active: it cuts more finely than any double-edged sword: it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or joints from the marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts.' We can understand the word of God in this passage to mean both the Holy Scriptures, and Jesus, the Word made flesh. When we read the Bible, its God-inspired wisdom pierces our souls, hearts and minds, calling us to repentance and to faith. As we saw in the Gospel reading, Jesus, too, pierced right to the

heart of the rich young man's dilemma: he, the great Physician, looked into his soul and diagnosed the problem; he located the excess baggage that was stopping the man from following him, and he wasn't afraid to tell him about it.

The same is true of us: if we will allow him, by his words in Scripture and his Spirit at work in our lives, Jesus looks into our hearts, minds and souls, and, as the great Physician, is able to diagnose what ails us spiritually, and, by his words in Scripture and his Spirit working within us, he is able to provide the remedy, if only we will accept it. As we all know, when there is something physically wrong with us, the treatment for it may well be painful and take a long time. The same is true of the ailments that afflict our souls: our sinful habits can only be remedied and purged if we are willing to allow the Scriptures, and the teaching of Jesus, to confront us and to challenge us to change our sinful ways by the healing power of his Spirit. Changing our ways is not easy, and we can only do it through determined prayer and the help of Jesus himself, as he works within us.

We all need to get rid of the excess baggage that encumbers us, and gets in the way of our discipleship. When Jesus was talking to the rich young man, he wasn't saying that all are called to poverty in order to follow him: rather, what he wanted to demonstrate was that man, and each of us, have areas in our lives that are so much more important to us than following Christ. It is these wants in our lives, not the bare essentials for our lives, that get in the way of what it truly means to follow Christ, who had nowhere to lay his head. It's very easy to rage against materialism and wealth, and to ignore the obstacles in our own lives, our sins and frailties, that stop us from following Christ as well as we ought.

In our spiritual journey, we need to shed our excess baggage of the sins that weigh us down, in order to free us up to be better disciples. The only way we can do that is, through the teachings of the Scriptures and the Spirit of Jesus at work within us, to acknowledge our sins, our failures and our fears; to allow ourselves to be made uncomfortable by the truth about our lives; and to allow Jesus to change us into the people he calls us to be, freed from the burden of our sins and all that would keep us from following him.

Jesus looks steadily at each one of us today, as he did to that young man; and, as he loved that young man, he loves each of us as well. But, just because he loves us, doesn't mean that he is not going to challenge us to change. This will not be an easy process for any of us; for Jesus looks into our hearts and souls, and sees in us what stops us from following him. We know, if we are honest, what the sins and temptations are that get in the way of our discipleship, and cause breakdowns in our relationships with one another and with God. And, if we think we're alright, and that there's nothing for us to change about ourselves, then we need to take a very hard look at ourselves and our behaviour, and ask the Holy Spirit to give us the humility to see ourselves for what we truly are: sinful human beings in need of God's healing, forgiveness and grace. This is the only way that we will be able to become the people God truly wants us to be, and how we will be able to walk more closely with the Lord.

Today, Jesus is looking steadily at you and at me: he is looking at us in love. But, he is asking us to be honest with him about ourselves; he is asking us to shed the excess baggage that weighs us down and to confess our sinfulness and allow him to help us to change. This may be a painful and protracted process, but if we are serious about our discipleship then we know that it is what we must do. Jesus is our comforter and our consoler, but he also our King and our Judge. Let us not be like the rich young man, and go away sad because we cannot accept Jesus' teaching, and the truth about ourselves. Rather, let us allow him to make us uncomfortable enough in this present life, that we store up our treasure in heaven and do not fall short and fail to gain eternal life in the world to come.

Amen.