

Ministers Everyone!

Sermon by Laura Thomson ~ October 11, 2009 ~ Laity Sunday

Good Morning Christians!

First of all, I would like to thank Rev. Susan for helping us plan this service and for her incredible spiritual leadership. Can we pause for a moment of silent prayer.

As we know, today is Laity Sunday. It is a time that we as lay members examine our role as Christians, not only in our immediate community, but in our society. My brother often says, though many of us may be called, we are not all called to preach. I think everyone here today has been called, as a lay minister, in service to God. But how do we serve? How do we minister to each other? This certainly is a time to consider these questions as well as the vows that we took when we became church members. And, it is the time to celebrate our ministry and that of all lay Christians.

I am particularly fond of the Gospel Reading from *Mark* this morning. It is so familiar to all of us. Not only do we know the story of the rich young ruler, but this whole section is chock full of tidbits that we ourselves repeat throughout our life time. “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” “The first shall come last.”

I have recently read a commentary on the *Gospel According to Mark*. One of the things they suggest is that you just sit down and read the whole book, without commentary, first. *Mark* is one of the shorter books in the Bible and the thought of doing this in a group, as part of a Bible study, seems very exciting to me.

In the *Commentary*, this particular section is entitled ‘Sayings on Entry to the Kingdom’. The first

part includes Jesus instructing the disciples to allow the children to come. This is his first lesson on true wealth. For he reminds us that unless we come to God with minds like little children, we will not be able to enter the kingdom. Of course, the first question is, what does he mean by the expression, 'the mind of a child'. Naturally, this suggest that in order to enter the kingdom we must come to God with the innocence of a child. We must humble ourselves and learn to trust. Yet, we must be totally dependant on God, as children depend on their parents.

Every minister has spoken on this issue at least once. We pray and we try to manipulate and control; but, ultimately, we must give ourselves up to God and trust in the Holy Spirit. Can't you think of instances in your own life where you have thought and done everything you possibly can? And, it is not until you relinquish your spirit totally that your prayers are truly answered. How many of us have confronted serious physical and mental issues? Though we certainly thrive because of our health providers, ultimately, we must put our trust in God. This is not to say that we do not make choices and that we are not affected by our choices. But, in the end, we must trust God.

The Hebrew readings for several Sundays have focused on the book and disposition of Job. Who has not walked through the darkness and felt that there is no light at the end of the tunnel? Which one of us has not suffered and questioned her or his suffering? During these times, it is so easy to feel separated from God. But the *Book of Job* teaches us that though we receive both good and bad from God, God is always present.

In our Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus has already blessed the children, when the rich young ruler approaches. He is garbed, not only in fine clothing, but has been good in every way. How forlorn he is when he realizes that he must give up his material wealth in order to follow Jesus. How many of us would be able to do this?

Materialism is one of the biggest thorns in life. Yet, it becomes one of our most cherished values.

We are constantly in want of things. Our children are relentless in their requests for things we hardly know exist. We even respect those who have more possessions than we as if this is some inherent quality to their character. Some of us even believe that the more we have, the more God has blessed us. What is the message here? How can we really obtain the true wealth of eternal life or a true relation with God? How do we apply this to our own lives?

Jesus is asking us not to let material wealth or any possessions, or any behavior imprison us. We need to ask ourselves 'Is there anything I am unwilling to give up for God' Are we willing to risk the security of wealth over our concern for others? Can we have real life if we are not willing to lose life? God is asking us to step outside of ourselves, our confined worlds of self absorption, and sometimes destructive behaviors, and fill that void with Jesus Christ. Get right with God! But let us turn from ourselves and advance to the great causes of humanity. Let us turn from taking and accumulating to lives that affirm others, lives of healing and wholeness.

I have often considered myself the prodigal daughter or son, as it were. I have come to church and left the church and come back and left. Being a minister's daughter, originally I rebelled against the rigidity of just going to church. But what I have discovered this time is God working through me. It's not just a matter of coming back, but really wanting to enter the kingdom of God. And though we know that Jesus accepts us 'just as we are' he still demands that we examine ourselves and commit to change.

Unlike the rich young ruler, we, as lay Christians, have chosen to take up the cross. We have chosen to focus on Jesus' call and faith and to try and gain the kingdom of heaven.

At Holy Trinity, we are a group of lay ministers that have done an incredible job of developing spiritual leaders and committees responsible for the total support of our congregation. We have confronted sensitive issues from all facets of our society and have come up with positive results. Our goals continue to include the support of our missions as well as to address new ones. Our

Capital Campaign has already been put to good use in the maintenance of our church building. As we approach a transition, there is no reason to believe that these support systems that we have put in place will not continue.

As individual lay Christian ministers, we all try to give of ourselves in service in some way and to help our church meet its goals. I bet there is not a person here, even a retired person, whose life is not filled with juggling events, family, jobs, and other interests. But how much do we devote or allow for serving others in some way? Do we even remember to pray for the unfortunate? It is true that there are some who have active and fruitful prayer lives. But all of us have this capability. Remember to pray and especially pray for others. Prayer is the time that we spend with God alone and listen for God's response to our prayers.

Have we balanced our lives so that we can be charitable? Do we consider charity? Do we order our lives so that they demonstrate a real concern for others? These are the ways we can enter a true relationship with God.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge is to witness to others. How hard it is to say, 'I am a Christian.' In today's world where we are confronted with inclusiveness, we are afraid of offending anyone who is not like us. But how can we say and how can we demonstrate, 'I am a Christian' without self consciousness and without making someone else feel excluded.

We must cling to the principles that make us Christians. Jesus accepts everyone as a child of God because God made us all. We accept and we demonstrate our acceptance, without discrimination, by enabling all to participate fully in the life of the church.

And what is our reward? A bond of fellowship is strengthened with hundreds of those we may touch. The world becomes topsy turvy, as it were. Many who were first become last: the last become first. There is an old Negro Spiritual that goes, "Get right with God. And do it now. Get

right with God. And he will show you how. Down by the cross, where he shed his blood. Get right with God! Get right! Get right with God.”

The Psalmists remind us over and over. If we honor the commitments that were made for us at our Baptism and the commitments we made when we became members of this Holy body, by serving God with a pure heart and honoring him with our prayers, our service and our offerings, we come into fellowship with God forever, and God will faithfully maintain the promise of his steadfast love. Amen!