

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost: June 30, 2024

Jesus is Rich, yet Poor

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost. We are now into summer with the 4th of July several days away. I hope everyone enjoys their summer and that if you travel you do so safely and return refreshed from wherever you might go.

That being said, Jesus is again on the go, but before I get to the Gospel, I would like to focus on a phrase in our Epistle to help us better understand why today's Gospel tells us a lot about Jesus' true nature, meaning the true nature of God.

Jesus is actually a cosmic bridge builder. And one usually starts building a bridge from one side to another. A bridge can't be built from the middle, as any engineer will tell you. We must choose a starting point. What the Gospel is saying, pure and simple, is that wherever we're going to start building our bridge, we had better start from the side of powerlessness, not power. Because if we start on the side of power, we will stay there forever, and be too comfortable. We need to start with the least of these.

And this leads us to the statement, *"For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich."*

God could come to earth in any form he creates. Yet unlike the Buddha, who was born into wealth and then denounced it, Jesus was born into lower middle-class status. He was fortunate enough to know how to read – we know this from examples of Jesus reading from the Torah. Yet he did his ministry walking or boating from town to town, relying on others to take care of him and his disciples. There is very little mention of ownership or property. He even borrowed the donkey for Palm Sunday (which I assume was returned.)

Why, for our sakes, would Jesus want to be poor? Why would Buddha and eventually most of the great spiritual leaders focus on being part of the people they are working with, rather than authority working above them? Is it because then their voices can be heard? If Jesus came as the king or militant leader some Jewish leaders were expecting, he would appear sinful to some, as an authority to others, or as something to be feared or turned away from. But instead, Jesus comes in a plain tunic, going door to door healing others for no fee. Jesus comes to love the least of these in a way that they can actually understand, and hear him. He is bringing God into their presence.

The good news is that Jesus came among the least of these as one of them, and therefore they understood that they were loved by God. While the Temple priests and scribes argued that the people were not worthy of seeking a relationship with God until they fulfilled their traditional duties which often came with a price tag, Jesus said no to this; and that God is with you, right here, right now, no charge.

So, Jesus in today's Gospel again shows us that God is with us, no matter who we are or what our social or economic status is. Both the hemorrhaging woman and the little girl are people of no substance to their society. In both scenes, by the traditions at the time, both women were unclean.

For the first woman, she must have had social status at one point because she states she paid the physicians all she had. So right there we learn that she is poor, at least poor now. She also has no male relative she can ask to approach Jesus, a man, a stranger, in her stead and ask for assistance. This would mean she is either a widow or had been abandoned by her husband or family due to her infirmity.

In fact, she doesn't call out to Jesus and ask for help, because from her perspective, she doesn't even exist. With a health issue involving blood of any type, there were prescribed rituals and rules if you wanted to come back into society, and that was only after the bleeding had stopped and cleansing had taken place. In this reading, the woman is still actively bleeding. She is unclean and untouchable, and unable to return to society.

And although she admits to Jesus that she was the one who touched him, Jesus does not rebuke her but instead invites her into his family referring to her as daughter. Jesus comes down to her situation in the best way that he can, to show she is accepted. Jesus is claiming he has bridged the gap, God has accepted her, forgiven her, and desires her to rejoin with the world.

For the young girl: once she had died, tradition is similar to our previous story. A corpse is only touched by a person of a lower social class that is assigned to unclean tasks. For Jesus to enter the home and touch the girl is unfounded, yet it shows again Jesus lowering himself to the need at hand. With humility he calls the girl back from death. Thus, reminding us it is never too late to put our faith in God, and He is there with us even in death.

God's ways are not our ways. Jesus is showing us acceptance of the lowest, the unclean, the outcast. God is with them all. This leads me to a question for you to ponder this week as we celebrate our country's independence and prepare for summer events. How does Jesus meet you?

What bridge did Jesus build to give you the faith to know you are loved by God, no matter what the circumstance? What is it about your faith that heals you? And have you become rich in your faith?

"For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." Amen