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### A PRESCRIPTION FOR LIFE

A number of years ago, I received a note from a friend who is a medical doctor.

- In the note, he asked me to pray for him, that the LORD might help him to help others.

I was quite moved by this request from a man whom I consider one of the finest physicians I know.

- What struck me was that this great doctor knew his human limitations, and he also knew of a healer greater than he:

- the GREAT PHYSICIAN, our LORD JESUS CHRIST.

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Many times in the Bible, we see JESUS in the role of the GREAT PHYSICIAN:

- healing the sick, the lame, the blind, lepers, the dying,

- and many others who were in need of HIS compassion and power.

Normally, when we think of JESUS as the GREAT PHYSICIAN, we think of HIS miracles to heal physical illness.

- Today, though, JESUS shows us another way HE does the work of a physician.

- Here, we see JESUS as ONE who will always give us a prescription for life.

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There are three important things that we should note about today's gospel and its message to us.

- The first thing we need to remember is that we all need a prescription for life.

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The young man in today's gospel came to JESUS asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

- This young man was looking for a simple prescription that would give him control over his life and his destiny."

- In fact, his question, "What must I do?" suggests that salvation is something that can be won by doing a particular thing or things.

- I recall a conversation I had with a young man who wanted to know, "What do I have to do to get GOD to love me again?"

- That young man from JESUS' day and the one to whom I spoke were really asking the same question:

- "What's the formula for getting to heaven?"

- "What's the thing I have to do to get right with GOD?"

- "What can I do that will make GOD love me?"

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How many of us would like eternal life to be so easily scripted?

- We might think so, but we also might not be very happy when we hear GOD's answer.

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Consider the situation of this young man who came looking for a guaranteed way into heaven.

- His concern was with himself and his future.

JESUS, however, attempts to redirect his eyes to those around him by citing the commandments that deal with human relations.

- You shall not murder.

- You shall not commit adultery.

- You shall not steal.

- You shall not give false testimony.

- You shall not defraud.

- Honor your father and mother.

But the young man shows that he misses JESUS' point by responding, "All these I have kept since I was a boy."

- JESUS is pointing out that spiritual life is not a matter of bookkeeping, where good acts offset the bad and win us the keys to heaven.
  - Upholding the law—the commandments—will make you an upright and decent person.
  - Many faithfully keep these commandments and are decent and upright members of the church.
    - But fewer have gone on to truly become disciples of JESUS, with a unique commitment to Christian love and self-giving.

"One thing you lack," JESUS says. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven."

- These are hard words to hear, aren't they?
- No wonder HIS disciples were shocked and amazed, especially when they could see how wealthy this young man was.
  - How could GOD expect one so wealthy to give up everything?
  - Could GOD require us to give up so much?

Didn't GOD expect Abraham to give up his only son, Isaac?

- To sacrifice him on a lonely mountaintop.
- Of course, we know that GOD intervened before Isaac died.
  - But what might GOD ask of us?
  - And what are we to do?
    - Surely, GOD cannot want a church filled with poor people who have given up everything they have worked so hard to get!

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Today's gospel is not about condemning wealth or abundance.

- Nevertheless, many times throughout history, the Church has used these verses to pressure its members into giving.

JESUS here, though, is warning not against the dangers of abundance, but rather against the attitudes that come from chasing riches.

- Think of how the pursuit of riches by large corporations has hurt the small, independent business person.
- Think of how the pursuit of political success has led some to go above the law to get what they want.
- Think how the pursuit of power has moved some to take land, resources, wealth, and even life to achieve dominance.

JESUS' words to the rich young man challenge us to look at our own lives.

- What is the thing in your life that keeps you from responding to the needs of others, from responding to GOD, in Christian love?
- What is the thing that JESUS would tell you to give up?
  - For some, it may be the pursuit of wealth.
  - For some, it may be an obsession with success.
  - For some, it may be the craving for power.
  - For some, it may be concern over the respect or acclaim of others.

JESUS' words today are a prescription to search our lives,

- to give up what will interfere with our commitment to the Kingdom of Heaven.
  - JESUS' words to us are a prescription for life.

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The second thing we should learn from today's gospel is that JESUS' prescription for life is given out of love.

- JESUS did not tell this young man to sell what he had out of jealousy, or from a dislike for what he represented.

We can know this by examining how JESUS responded to all HE met.

- His understanding and compassion showed the depth of HIS love for all people: the centurion, the adulterous woman, the thief on the cross.
- All of these and everyone else, for that matter, is treated by JESUS with the love and respect that all of GOD's people deserve.

Furthermore, JESUS' love for this man attempted to bring out the potential that JESUS saw in him.

- JESUS loved him because HE saw who this man might become in the Kingdom,
  - because of what this man was capable of doing.

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JESUS always sees people for who they are but also for what they might become.

- This was the case with Zacchaeus, whom JESUS called out of a tree and in whose house JESUS ate.
- This was the case with Saul, whom JESUS called upon to become HIS messenger to the Gentiles.
- This was the case with the disciples, whom JESUS saw to be simple fishermen but in whom HE also saw the potential for becoming fishers of men and women.

JESUS sees the potential in each of us—the possibility to go beyond who we are to become true disciples, committed to Christian love and self-giving.

- And so it is out of love that JESUS gives us a prescription for life.

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The third thing we can take out of today's passage is that with GOD, all things are possible.

- If our salvation really depends on what we do, what chance do we have?
  - It would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

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In the Holy Land and other places, great city gates were often equipped with a small door to open at night to allow people in.

- But a traveler with a camel would have to completely unload the camel, and even then, it would be difficult for the camel to pass through this door called the "eye of a needle."

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Could you give up all your riches?

Could you leave your home and your family?

- When JESUS gives you your prescription for life, will you be able to follow it?

If it were up to each one of us to win our way into heaven, "Who then can be saved?"

- Fortunately, we have JESUS' reassurance that what we cannot do, GOD can do by GOD's grace and power.
  - "With human beings, this is impossible, but not with GOD; all things are possible with GOD."
- Even when we can't leave our homes and families.
- Even when we are unable to part with our wealth.
- Even when we fail to answer the call to discipleship.
  - The power of GOD will bring to us the gracious gift of life eternal.
    - That is the ultimate promise of today's gospel.

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The grace of GOD will win for us what we ourselves cannot.

- That is a promise in which we can believe.
  - No matter what happens,
  - no matter who we might fail,
    - we have a GOD in whom we can trust,
    - a GOD in whom we may lay hold,
    - a GOD who will not fail us.

Our calling as Christians is to search our lives for what stands between us and the Kingdom.

- We need to know that this call “to give up our riches,” or whatever it may be, is made out of the love that JESUS has for us.
- And we can trust that even when we fail, GOD will not fail us.

Today’s gospel calls us finally to know faith in the gracious GOD, who offers us eternal life as a free gift;

- a gift that is ours through our faith,
  - the faith in JESUS that will lead us to JESUS’ prescription for life.