

THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF FORT LAUDERDALE

"The Friendly Church"

THE SERVICES OF WORSHIP

9:15 and 11:00 O'Clock

and

The Church Calendar



FEBRUARY 16, 1986



NEXT WEEK, FEBRUARY 23

"How To Forget The Past!"

Dr. Cromie will preach.

The Ministers
Richard M. Cromie
Steven L. Harberts
David R. Bluhm

Associate in Ministry
Noel A. Calhoun, Jr.

The Ministry of Music
J. William Stephenson
Kathryn P. Stephenson
Leoma Straker

**401 Southeast Fifteenth Avenue • Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33301
(305) 462-6200**

THE SERVICES OF WORSHIP

The Organ Prelude

"Chorale" (Leoma Straker) Cesar Franck

The Choral Introit

The Invitation to Worship

*The Processional Hymn, No. 20

"It Is Good to Sing Thy Praises" "Ellesdie"

*The Prayer of Invocation

*The Lord's Prayer

A Little Hymn Sing (9:15 a.m.)

The Choir Anthem (11:00 a.m.)

"O Lord Thou Hast Searched Me" (Cathedral Choir) Eugene Butler

The Sacrament of Infant Baptism

The Morning Prayers

The Choral Response (The Congregation to join the Choir)

Day by day, Day by day, O dear Lord three things I pray,

To see Thee more clearly, Love Thee more dearly, Follow Thee more nearly,

Day by day.

The Words of Welcome

(Please sign the pew pads which you will find at the end of each pew. Then, pass them along and return.)

The Presentation of Tithes and Offerings

The Offertory Anthem

9:15 a.m. "Cantate" (Kirk Singers) Natalie Sleeth

11:00 a.m. "O Divine Redeemer" Gounod
(Cathedral Choir — Shirley Blackwell, Soloist)

*The Doxology

*The Prayer of Dedication

The Scripture Lesson Matthew 19:23-30

The Solo

"I'd Rather Have Jesus Than Silver or Gold" ... (J. William Stephenson) ... Miller-Shea

The Sermon

"WHAT'S WRONG WITH BEING RICH?"

Dr. Cromie

Text: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."
— (Matthew 19:24)

*The Hymn, No. 433

"Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation" "Regent Square"

*The Benediction and Choral Response

"May the Lord, Mighty God, bless and keep you forever;

By His grace and His might help you in every endeavor.

Long may His grace be kind to you; may it fail you never;

May the Lord, Mighty God, bless and keep you forever."

*The Organ Postlude

"Fantasie on 'Holy, Holy, Holy'" (Kathryn Stephenson) Piet Post

*Congregation standing.

***The ushers may seat those who are waiting.

February 16, 1986

WHAT'S WRONG WITH BEING RICH?

Wednesday, February the Twelfth, 1986, was a big day in the world: It was Abraham Lincoln's birthday, and I hope you celebrated for Honest Abe. It was also Ash Wednesday which, oddly, went almost unnoticed in our church. It also was the 25th anniversary of my Ordination to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its ministry, and that did go entirely unnoticed. I expected at least on Wednesday morning that my staff would bow and curtsy when I walked into the building, and perhaps throw a little party, but there was no notice taken at all. When I arrived back home after a long, hard journey through Parish duties, I was positive that my family had planned a surprise party with the leaders of our Church, so that my Silver Anniversary in His Service would be suitably acknowledged. I went home to the same dinner that I always get: good and wholesome, without salt, butter, or bread, but nothing more.

My former secretary, Sandra Steving, called me from out of town to say: "Congratulations on your Silver Anniversary". That was nice. In fact, I too had forgotten until she called. Twenty-five years...already. I don't know what you think about the last Twenty-five years (If you are that old, or able to remember that far), but I cannot imagine how anyone could be more richly blessed than I have been in all that Christ had given me.

It was all rather timely, as I prepared for this sermon. Very early in my years as an assistant minister, I met a man who was confident, capable and rich. I mean, he had told me himself he had all the money in the world. I knew where it was, because I did not have any of it at that time. And he was a man who took great care of himself, too, I mean he was into fitness, and diet, and all those other things long before many of us thought about it, and at 55 years of age, just when I met him though, two years after an intensive physical examination at the Greenbar (?) Clinic, which was followed up two weeks prior to this, they told him he had an inoperable cancer, and there was nothing they could do.

One reason why I was so impressed with Frank Barnum (?) was that he was the first man I ever met who was dying, who knew it, and wanted to talk to me about it as a pastor. I think he taught me more in three months of my visitations than my professors taught me in three years, good as they were, for he condensed his life in goals into that period of time which was covered by my twice-a-week visits, and even today, 24 years later (and I only knew him for three months), I feel him looking over my shoulder now and then, to prompt me to go on.

Well, one of the particular things we talked about was the question of what really matters at the end. And it was he who first began to talk to me about the way the Church deals with the rich, he said. He told me that

over his life it seemed as though the preachers on the pulpit had somehow assumed that there is something wrong with being rich, and that it was somehow saintly...saintly to be poor. He said: "I've never heard a sermon in favor of the rich... never." He said: "What if all your offering trays came back empty some Sunday? Where would your church be without the wealthy people of the land? What's wrong" he barked, "With being rich?" Hmm...

Now it took me a long time to answer Frank's question, because I was afraid. I suppose one of the nice things about getting older is: you really don't care as much about what people think. You worry more about what God thinks and what the truth really is. I guess I was fearful that I would say the wrong thing rather than the right thing, which reminds me of a story.

There is a cartoon of the pastor with his assistant in the study following the service. And there are all the offering trays with huge, enormous piles of twenty- and fifty- and ten dollar bills and stacked high. And the pastor said to the assistant: "Wow! We better go over that manuscript again. I must have said something!" Well, I was afraid I would say something of the opposite. But listen! I was never afraid of offending the rich...never. I found over the years that the rich can take care of themselves. I was

afraid of offending the poor...that somehow I would make them feel insignificant, if I ever dared to preach a sermon that hinted that it was all right to be rich.

So that you will know my bias from the very beginning, let me put it forth with unmistakable candor: There is nothing wrong with being rich...nothing at all. I've been pastor to some of the wealthiest people in America, and I've been pastor to some of the poorest. And I want to tell you after 25 years of ministering: the percentage of good guys and the other guys is just about the same in the wealthiest places of the land and the poorest. There are some of the good people in both, and some of the other kind, too. It depends on who you are, how you got to be that way, and what you intend to do about it. Right? Who you are, how you got to be that way, and what you intend to do about it.

Now, it is sad for the preacher who likes to be Biblical, because at this point the Bible is not clear-cut and conclusive. It has a very confusing tale to tell as a matter of fact. On the one hand it seems to say that God blesses his faithful servants with wealth and success and good health and long life. But you know that is not true, because there are many good and faithful servants who die young, who have bad health, and who are poor. They choose occupations that are not

rewarding, they fail in business, they do all kinds of things, or other people do other things to them. Right? On the other hand it seems to say that there is something meritorious about being poor...and you know that is not true either, don't you? Because poverty comes for a lot of reasons, some of which are not so meritorious. So let's look at the Bible for a minute, and then we'll hurry on to a little wee sermon at the end and see if Christ is speaking to you. O.K.?

A long and winding road goes through the Scripture and you have to follow it closely if you want to get to the end of what it teaches about wealth. By the way, lest you think I am sneaking up on you, forget it...This is not a sermon about money. I am not asking you about anything, and we will not pass the baskets again when the sermon is over. I will ask you to make a commitment to Jesus Christ anew. That's where we are going, if you want to doze off for a minute or two.

Early in the Old Testament wealth is clearly a blessing from God. Abraham was a wealthy man, and he received it because God gave it to him and God gave it to him because he was faithful and good. It was that simple, say no more. As the Bible progressed, that theme continued

until the time of the Prophets, when particularly Amos, but also Ezekiel and Jeremiah and Micah in particular (I can give you those references, and we'll do it when we print the sermon, if you like), they began to notice that something happens with some rich people, and it has to do with what those rich people did to get rich, and how little they now care about the poor. When Amos says: "Woe to you who are at ease in Zion" it appears as though he is talking about all of the rich. But he is mainly talking about those who have avoided their responsibility to use their wealth responsibly to help the people of the land. If you truly love your brother, how can you allow him to die of hunger? And it was said all through those prophets that the rich can be identified with graft and corruption, and even Isaiah says, the patrician of them all: "They will go down to the Underworld!"

In the Wisdom literature (that is the early Old Testament. The Wisdom literature is mainly the Psalms and Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and some other things) mostly there the rich are mentioned in the Old Testament, by the way, and there is says, very simply and clearly that the rich have it nicer than the poor. I guess that is right, they do. And they say that the roots of wealth, if you are economical, you become rich. It says in Proverbs 24. If you are

industrious and work hard, you will make money. If you refrain from wickedness, God will bless you. And the fruits of wealth, it says, are security and honor and the privilege - are you listening? - of giving alms. The privilege, it is. I have never envied anyone's money, I have envied the joy it would be to help someone at the time of need; or to fund a mission that is so necessary; or to truly pour out my sums to the Church.

It says that there are dangers in being overly wealthy: that you can forget where the wealth came from; that you tend to become arrogant about it; that you begin to trust in riches and not in God...there is a danger of a crooked path, it calls it to the life of faith, but those are warnings, not condemnations. And the Wisdom Literature ends: "A good name is better than all the money in the world." Did you hear that? More, do you believe it? "A good name is better than all the money in the world."

Now, stay with me for the survey. It is a little pedantic, I understand, but you really need to know this to get where I want you to go with me. When you get to the New Testament, there is a little bit of difference between Matthew and Mark as the first two Gospel writers, between Luke and

then Paul. Let me tell you a tiny bit about it.

In Matthew and Mark particularly, the whole emphasis changes. Nobody is talking about God pouring out riches upon his chosen servants, and because most of the people who followed him poor, and it is no particular merit in being poor, but here it gets confusing and we will come back to that. But it does say in an eschatological sense, that means the world to come, in the most beautiful verse of all probably: "What does it matter if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul?"

You cannot take it with you. Honest. So you heap it up in bigger and bigger barns, and comes the voice to say: "Thou fool. You missed it." In the Sermon On the Mount, Matthew ends it, the words of Jesus, by saying, no attack on the wealthy, just a warning: "That you are to seek first the Kingdom of God, and God will give you what He wants you to have."

Now, when you get to Luke, I want to warn you about Luke. He is a friend of the poor, and every time somebody has a problem, Luke is a soft touch. I mean, he is in favor of the hungry and those who need healing, and he tilts his Gospel. I mean, he is allowed to do it. God inspired him to do it that way, so that you and I could read it. But in the Gospel accord-

ing to Luke, there are the parables of the poor widow, and the hungry getting fed, and Lazarus and Dives and that the rich will be thrown out of the Kingdom of God...and they are the opponents of Jesus, the rich people are, according to Luke. 16 of 38 Parables concern how to handle money and possessions and one out of ten verses (did you hear me?) one out of ten verses in the Gospel has to do with money and possessions. There are 500 verses in the Bible on prayers, 500 on faith, and 2000 on money and possessions. It must be significant. Right?

But then, with St. Paul, the focus shifts again
a
to higher level. He says: "There is only one richness in the world, and it does not matter whether you have a^{high} stack of \$100 bills or you have two cents. The only richness that's worth talking about is the richness of the presence of Jesus Christ. And if you have that, you have everything you need.

And in other parts of the New Testament there are warnings about the danger of coveting riches, and in the Book of James there are dire warnings about the accumulation of money and wealth and status, but it is always in reference to the reaching out to the widows and orphans, and feeding the poor. What you do with your money, not whether you have your money, is the point. Now, turn the page. The historical survey is over (Some of you are saying: Thank goodness!).

Let us get to the Scripture text and move on, and then we are done. Our text is from Matthew 19:24, where it says: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." Right?

It could mean actually going through the eye of the needle...it probably means there were two gates, I saw them last May. To every entrance to the city, the walled City of Jerusalem, there was a big gate in the center, where cars try to go through now, it is so crowded you can hardly get through...and there was a little gate, the "needle-gate" beside it, where the people walked through, after they closed the big gate at night, so marauders could not get in on their big, shining Arab stallion horses. And when the big gate was closed, it was really hard if you got locked ~~xxx~~ outside to get your camel inside. I mean, I rode a camel with some luck ?() and I tell you, they are big! And I have a picture to prove it! Mrs. Cromie did not ride a camel, and we have no picture to prove that, but she wouldn't even go near the camel to get her picture taken, but...in order to get the camel through the eye of the needle, you had to take all the burden off, unload them, you know, and it has been hours loading them up and then you had to take everything off them, and you had to push them down, and squeeze him under, and pull them through, and check them through, and do everything under the sun...

It usually was not worth it, and they slept outside and waited till the morning.

So Jesus was really graphic when he said, in free translation, according to Cromie: "You know, you better watch out, because if you have a lot of money, you've got a great responsibility. It is easier to be faithful when you are poor. It is easier to be faithful when you are poor. So be careful, because it is just about as hard for the wealthy people to get into the Kingdom of God as it is for a camel to scooch under a little needle-gate and get in to the city."

Isn't it funny how this story follows on the parable of the rich young ruler...Do you remember that? In Matthew 19, it talks about the young man...he had everything. I mean he was rich, he was young, and he was a ruler. Now, what more could you want to be? He probably had a nice wife, and four great kids, who never did anything wrong. Rich, young and a ruler...Halleluiah....that is what we all would like to be, if we are honest, and yet...something was missing for the poor boy. And he came to Jesus, and said: "How can I inherit eternal life? I mean, I've got everything in this life, I don't need anything else. I've got enough to last me if I last to 95...but something is empty in here, Lord!" Do you know the feeling? "I am restless...I am lonely...and until I find some way to be fulfilled, I will be empty!"

to him
Jesus said/: "Follow the Commandments!" He said:
"I already do." Jesus said: "Fine, if you do..." Well, the
commandments Jesus picked were interesting. He said: "You
shall not steal." I wonder if he was thinking the man probably
stole to get his fortune. "It says 'Honor your father and
your mother and your family'" . You know, I wonder if Jesus
was saying to the boy:"Did you set aside your family in order
to make your riches? Did you neglect your wife and children?
Because if you did, it was not worth it, no matter how much
money you have." He said: "You shall not kill...You shall
not commit adultery, have you been unfaithful on your
journeys?" Because Jesus was sort of saying: "If you cannot
be faithful to your wife, how can you ever be faithful to your
God?"

But you know about that...It is time for a little
sermon, and then we are done.

The first thing I want to say is: Riches can be
a blessing, they are a gift of God. The Hollywood starlet
said: "I've been poor and I've been rich, and rich is better!"
No question about it. I've never envied wealth, as I said,
but I'd love for the chance to use it. I have a friend who
gives enormous money to charity, I mean enormous...He did not
make much more than a lot of you, he did not make that much
more than I do...but he said he said to the Lord: "As soon

as I have enough to manage things, I am going to give you fifty per cent of everything I earn (after taxes)." And he said: "I made that promise to God ten years ago, and I am happy to tell you that both of us made out pretty good! After I have everything I need, half of the rest goes to God."

Secondly, riches can be a burden. I mean, they destroy relationships...When Abby Rockefeller was told (this is a true story) that she was going to receive 25 million dollars on her 21st birthday, you know what she told her dad? "I don't want it!" He said: "You're crazy, honey!" She said: "Dad, we have enough trouble getting along in this family, and I have enough problem being a Rockefeller...I don't want the money!" He said: "You have to take it, honey, it is irrevocable!" You lawyers know that term. So she did, and she spent a wonderful life trying to give it away...But money can destroy relationships, because it stands in the way of the freedom one has within a family...It is the price you pay because for everything you get, you give up something else in this world! Great wealth can be a burden!

And the last thing I want to say is the easiest. Great wealth can be a blessing, great wealth can be a burden. But I found out in 25 years of ministry the simplest thing I know. Riches do not do it. Being wealthy, John D. Rockefeller

referred about three years ago was driving down from Hills to the city. He was in a little Mustang. He had three hundred million dollars, and a car came over the dividing line, hit his car...and John D. Rockefeller was dead. Can you imagine the little conversation where he is saying: "But wait a minute...I've got so much money...you just cannot run into me! I mean, I am so important in this society, you don't dare hit me!" Riches do not do it...

There was Zaccheus down in Jericho. What a lovely city...the Fort Lauderdale of the Holy Land. Beautiful palm trees, lots of water, lots of growth, lots of wonderful people...great churches! Zaccheus, it says, had it all. He was very, very, very rich! I mean, he had a Hickey Freeman suit, hand tailored, and had Bally shoes from Switzerland, he had a Countess Mara tie...and he went out one day like a little boy, and he climbed a sycamore tree, which was dirty as sycamore trees are...and ruined his suit, and his tie, and his shoes. I can almost hear his wife saying: "Zacch, are you out of your mind?" He said: "Honey, I can always buy a new suit. but I cannot buy a new life...and I need a new life." So he climbed up the tree, with all of his money... And he found a new life...because Jesus Christ was passing by.

I don't know where you are...Maybe you've got a lot of money. Maybe you just pretend to have a lot of money. Maybe you are in debt...living on the Intracoastal. I don't know. Maybe you are poor...maybe you pretend to be poor. I don't know. But I do know this: Whatever, whoever you are, and whatever you have, it ain't worth nothing unless you found the one who loves you...not for what you have, but for what you are.

Take a minute, friends, just a second...we are going to sing, we are going to sing 310: "Take My Life And Let It Be"...I am changing the last hymn... But take a minute...just in some new way, maybe you've never said it before, even if you said it a thousand times: just pray to God to take you as you are, so you don't have to live up to anybody's expectations any more, but His, and whether you have five million, or five cents, He will reach out His hand and hold you and take you as you are.

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.