

How to Strike it “Rich”  
Serving the Poor—Compassionately  
Matthew 25: 31-40

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On August 31, 1997, Princess Diana and her boyfriend Dodi were trying to outrun the paparazzi through the streets of Paris when their driver, Henri Paul, hit a pillar in a tunnel, killing three of the four passengers in the car. The world was stunned. This princess, who could make the headlines by waving her hand or send sensations through the media by wearing a party dress, was dead. The queen of people’s hearts was gone. Over one billion people watched her funeral as Elton John sang about a candle in the wind.

On September 5, 1997, the day of Princess Diana’s funeral, an elderly Albanian nun slipped out of this world into eternity. For nearly fifty years this “Saint of the Gutter” had cared for the hungry, the naked, the homeless, and the crippled on the streets of Calcutta, India. Mother Theresa was given a full state funeral. The Prime Minister of Pakistan called her a “rare and unique individual who lived long for higher purposes.” The world nodded at her passing, but hardly stopped to mourn her loss.

It’s All Saints Sunday. We have survived the ghosts and goblins of another Halloween and find ourselves in church affirming our faith in the “Communion of the Saints.” We gather to remember. And today especially, I pose this question. Who was rich? More importantly I ask, “What is the difference between a celebrity and a saint”? On our way to Holy Communion, let me just share a few pointers that I hope you think about in the hours to come.

**SAINTS ARE THOSE WHO SEE.**

Every time I read Jesus’ parable of the Last Judgment, I am

struck by the adverb “when.” *‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, or when did we see you thirsty, or when did we see you naked, or when did we see you sick?’* Both those who see and those who fail to see the needs around them ask the same question, “When?” Those who helped didn’t remember helping; those who passed by didn’t remember passing by. So the common question of all on the last day is “When? Lord, when?”

Mother Theresa once said, “I never look at the masses as my responsibility, I look at the individual. I can love only one person at a time. I can feed only one person at a time. So you begin with one. If I didn’t pick up that one person, I wouldn’t have picked up 42,000. My whole work is only a drop in the ocean. But if I didn’t put the drop in, the ocean would be one drop less.”

Saints are those who find a need and try to fill it. Their action may not be a solution to the health care crisis in America, but transportation for an elderly person to the doctor. Their action may not be a cure for cancer, but a card and a prayer for one battling the disease. We may not be able to solve the drug problems that threaten our teens, but we can make friends with some kid on the edge. Saints are those who have eyes to see and they never think of it as anything out of the ordinary. Lord, when?

### **SAINTS ARE THOSE WHO LOVE.**

Love is an action verb. ‘I was a stranger and you took me in. I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ The true reason of our existence is to be the sunshine of God’s love. As the Saint William Law put it, “All religion is the Spirit of Love, all its gifts and graces are the gifts and graces of love. It has no breath, no life, but the life of love itself.”

I preached recently in ancient Corinth, where St. Paul lived and worked and tried to get Jews and Greeks to love each other. This cosmopolitan city was home to the temple of Aphrodite, the pagan goddess of love. Her temple was

perched high upon a hill. Over a thousand prostitutes were employed by the temple to cultivate love. The struggling church in the city below found it easier to love in theory than in reality. They had trouble getting along. They couldn't get their secular lives and their spiritual lives together. Some in the church thought of themselves as super Christians because they spoke in unknown tongues. To such a place as this Paul wrote the finest poem that has ever been written in the history of the world or as Eugene Peterson puts it:

“Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut. Love doesn't have a swelled head. Love doesn't force itself on others, it isn't always “Me first.” It doesn't fly off the handle; it doesn't keep score of the sins of others; it doesn't revel when others grovel. It takes pleasure in the flowering of truth. It puts up with anything and trusts God always.” The longer I live, I think it is in that four-letter word, LOVE.

That's why I am calling us as a congregation to “Love one another, Radically,” For when it's all been said and done, only one thing will really matter. Did I live my life for God? Did I love others?

**SAINTS ARE THOSE WHO SHARE THE LIGHT.**

Celebrities attract the light. The names of celebrities are flashed in lights. Saints on the other hand share the light. They shine from within.

It was said of Brother Lawrence, that saint of the 17th Century, that it could be a dark and dreary day, but when he entered the room, the day became brighter and the mood became lighter, simply because Brother Lawrence was there. That's what saints do. They share the light.

Back in Sweden in 1716, the story goes that King Charles XII announced to a tiny town that he was coming for a visit, and

that he planned to worship at the tiny village church. Well, the pastor got so excited about the royal visit that he laid aside his usual text and delivered a eulogy on the greatness of the royal family. A few weeks later, a gift arrived for the pastor from the king. Inside was a life-size crucifix—a statue with Jesus hanging on the cross. Included was this note from the king: “Place this on the pillar opposite the pulpit so you will always be reminded of your proper subject.”

Remember what the gospel says of John the Baptist. *“He was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every person”* (John 1:8). Saints reflect that light simply by living.

One of these years, our names will be listed in some bulletin as one of the dead. How do you want to be remembered? A reporter asked Pastor Rick Warren what he wanted written on his tombstone. Rick replied with these four words, “At least he tried.” When someone has to find a few words to say about you, what do you want them to say?

Maybe William Cullen Bryant said it for all of us:

So live that when thy summons comes to join  
that innumerable caravan, that moves to the  
pale realms of shade,  
Where each shall take his chamber in the silent  
halls of death,  
Thou go not, like a quarry-slave at night, scourged  
to his dungeon;  
But sustained and soothed by one who wraps the  
drapery of his couch  
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

For all that has been, dear Lord, we thank you.  
For all that is, dear Lord, we honor you.  
For all that is to come, dear Lord, we praise you.  
Amen.