

When preachers preach on today's Gospel, we often preach about how someone's attachment to their money and possessions or other worldly things can keep them from following Jesus as their Lord and Savior,...and can have serious eternal consequences. ...Well, today I've chosen a slightly different, but related, theme from our Gospel... and that is: *how hard it is for us to let go, to trust God., to trust Jesus...* I'm going to start off with what could've been a true story....It could've been.

It's about a man named Jack...He was hiking along a very steep cliff that had a 200 ft drop off, when suddenly the ground under his feet gave way, and he started to slide down the embankment. ...As he was sliding down, desperately trying to stop falling, he was able to grab hold of a branch growing out of the side of the cliff,...and he hung on to it for dear life...Looking down, he could see the rocky canyon below that would mean certain death if he let go...There was no way he could climb back up,... so Jack yelled out, hoping someone would hear him. "Is anyone up there?" ...No answer...He kept on yelling, "Is anyone up there?" Still no answer..

Just as he was about to lose his grip, he heard a voice, "Jack, can you hear me?"...Jack shouted back, "Yes, I can hear you, but I can't see you?"..."That's ok, Jack. I am the Lord, and I can see you." ... "You mean, you're God?"..."That's right, Jack...I'm going to help you...Just do as I say." ... "Ok, Lord...Just tell me what I need to do."..."All right, Jack...Now... let go of the branch." "What?.. What's that you say, Lord?"..."I said, let go of the branch...trust me." ...Jack looked down into that deep canyon,...thought for a minute,.. then called out, "Anyone else up there?"

In this story, God. told Jack to let go of the branch he was tightly holding on to, and to trust that He would lead him to safety... But Jack just couldn't do it. He couldn't let go and put his life in God's hands. ...In our Gospel, Jesus told the rich man to let go of what he was holding on to so tightly – his possessions, his wealth - and to follow Jesus to a richer, more rewarding life... He had to make a choice...He could keep his bank accounts, his material possessions, the comfortable life he was enjoying,..or He could choose to become a true disciple of Jesus....He chose to keep his wealth....Even though Jesus promised him treasures in heaven, the rich man couldn't see how following Jesus would take care of him the way all his money and possessions would.

Let go and let God...You've all heard that, right?. It seems very simple, doesn't it? But we all have times when we find it hard to let go and to let God,...to trust God...Now, trust isn't exactly the same as faith. ...Faith is accepting and believing all that God. has revealed,...especially in the person of His Son Jesus Christ..**Trust** comes from our faith...It is because of our faith that we are to trust God with all of our hearts, and commit every aspect of our lives to Him with complete confidence... And it's easy for us to do that, to trust God., to trust Jesus, when things are going good...It's easy when our wallets are full,...when there are no bills we can't pay, when our marriage is strong,...when we love our job,...when everyone is healthy, ...when the kids are doing good in school...But it's a lot harder to trust God when things are not going so good.

Sometimes it's because- in the midst of big troubles - we think that God has forgotten us,...has abandoned us...Or that God wouldn't want to help us because we've let Him down so many times ...Or maybe things are so bad, that we don't think even God can get us through it...All we know is that the pain we are feeling,.. the struggle we're going through, ..the difficult choices we have to make,...the great loss we suffered,... are really putting our faith to the test..."Can I really trust that God's gonna get me thru this?"

In Roman 5, St Paul says when we have faith, when we have trust in God, then when we are hit with some trouble, some affliction, ...we will have the endurance to get through it, ...and this will give us confidence and courage for the next time (and don't worry, there's always a next time),...and this in turn will give rise to HOPE,...a hope that, Paul says, will not disappoint...It's this HOPE that keeps us going as we share in the sufferings of Christ,...the hope that- like Him - our suffering, our Good Friday will be followed by an Easter Sunday.

And so, when we are facing tough situations,...that are beyond our control, ...When there's nothing we can do to make anything better...When we try to handle it ourselves, ...knock our head against a wall,... do everything in our power,... but the problem, the trouble, the pain, doesn't go away...That's when all we can do is to surrender, .. let it go and turn it over to God....Place our total trust in God..."Here it is Lord...I've finally figured it out. This is something I can't do a thing to change...So, I'm putting it in your hands;... I'm trusting that whatever you make happen will be for the best...I won't stop praying about it,... but I won't knock myself out trying to fix it either...I'm leaving that up to you, Lord." ...It can be awfully hard to admit we can't fix it.... and to accept our human limitations... But sometimes, with TRUST and HOPE, we just have to "Let go and let God."

In my ministry as a chaplain at Rochester General Hospital, I have been blessed to visit many patients who have inspired me as I see them deal with pain and uncertainty and helplessness with a total trust in God that puts them totally at peace ...So often, I've walked out of a hospital room asking, "Lord, who was helping who in there?"...I was supposed to be comforting and reassuring the person in that bed, but I was the one being comforted and reassured,...like I was recently by an 80-yr old patient who had been hit by a car that left him a quadriplegic ...I had just told Thomas how sorry I was for what he was going through, ...when he looked up at me, smiling ear-to-ear, tears filling his eyes, and spoke these words, "Deacon Ron, don't you worry about me...I put it all in God.'s hands. However it turns out, ...it'll be all right...I'm gonna do my part and pray and stay hopeful and trust God to do the rest."

One final thought about trusting God. It doesn't mean we just sit back and say, "OK, Lord, you take over. I can't handle this. You do it all." ..That's not how God works. There's a verse from the Book of Proverbs: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart,...and He will direct your paths."... If we trust the Lord, He will direct us, lead us where we need to go....let us know what we need to do...And, we have to do our part. We have to be open to the power of the Holy Spirit guiding and prodding and encouraging us... as we pray, as we celebrate the Sacraments,... as we hear God's word proclaimed and preached,... ...as we listen to the people and the messages God sends to us... We still have to do the hard work of living our life, facing the challenges, making the tough decisions, but we do it knowing that God. is in control...that God. has our back.

Try to think of it this way. Life is like a bike ride,...not on a regular bike, but on a tandem bike - a bicycle built for two. And the two are you and Jesus.. If you place your trust in Jesus, you will let Him take the front seat so that He has control of where the bike will go,...while you're in the back seat helping Him to pedal... As long as the road of your life is straight and smooth, you can relax and enjoy the ride;..You don't have to pedal very hard to keep the bike moving. But when the road gets rough and rocky, when there are sharp corners to negotiate or steep hills to climb, you might become worried or anxious or afraid, and it's all you can do to just hang on,... "Jesus, where are you taking me? I'm scared!"... And he'll laugh and say, "Don't worry. Don't be afraid...I'm doing the steering....You just keep on pedaling.....Just keep on pedaling." ...AMEN.