

**The Rev. Luke Selles**

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“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

One of my least favorite parts of sewing by hand is threading the needle. Unless you have had a lot of practice or have incredible close-range vision, neither of which I have, the operation usually takes a lot of tries – and some curses – before I can thread the needle. But it doesn’t take sewing experience or knowledge to know that a camel *cannot* fit through the eye of a needle. There is *no* expert hand that can guide a camel into that tiny hole. In his parable, Jesus is teaching the disciples and us in no unclear terms that it is impossible without divine intervention for a rich person to enter heaven.

At the beginning of the story we see a rich young man kneel before Jesus, a humble carpenter who lives on the road, healing the sick and preaching to the poor, and this man asks him for the way to “eternal life.” Jesus reminds this man, who like Jesus is a Jew, to follow the Torah, the law of Moses. To this, the young man says that he has followed the letter of the law since his childhood, never straying. We are told then that Jesus, looking at him, “loved him.” But instead of granting him “eternal life” on the spot and sending him on his way, Jesus challenges him: “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” Then we are told that the man, “shocked,” “went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” The disciples, like us, have some follow-up questions: this was not a good PR move on Jesus’ part. We may wonder: is Jesus teaching us that it is wrong to be wealthy? As we hear this message, we are blessed to sit in a beautiful church commissioned by Henry Houston, a faithful man whose legacy lives on here in Chestnut Hill. In fact, many beautiful things, many sacred spaces, have only been made possible because of the generosity of the wealthy.

I think it's important for us today to reflect on two things. First, that while we don't know what was in the rich, young man's heart, Jesus did. And sure enough, Jesus hit on a sore spot for the rich man: his many possessions. The man, although a devout follower of Adonai, the one true God, the creator and sustainer of all things seen and unseen has made himself as large as a camel with his possessions – he has status and security and comfort. Yet even through all of that he seems to sense that those things are not eternal, not lasting. So, he seeks to secure himself and his own interests further, attaining a sort of spiritual life insurance.

But the way to eternal life, Jesus teaches, is through sacrifice, through becoming small – we are not the creator, but creatures in the creator's world. And so we must also consider Jesus' teaching here – that in order to become small enough to fit through the eye of a needle, we must surrender to God's power and sovereignty over our lives. Jesus says this work is “impossible for mortals, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

And as we gather around this altar in a moment, we recognize that this work has been done – Jesus, as God's son, gave up everything to be like us and then gave us his life so that we would become God's forever – not God's possessions, but God's good and beloved children. Friends, the impossible is now made possible. But that doesn't mean the way is easy. In fact, it's lifelong work to winnow ourselves down so that we can thread the needle.

I wonder if we, like the rich young man, have assumed that the Kingdom of God, that heaven or “eternal life,” is some place in the distant future. But I say the Kingdom of God is right here – now – in our midst. What if we lived in that Kingdom now, the Kingdom where God is the only one who “possesses” anything – that anything we own now is a gift from God that is not meant to remain ours but is meant to be shared? How then would we think about our assets, properties, possessions? How then would we think about our time, talent, and attention? What if we learned to live in God's perfect economy, God's world, rather than our own? Amen.