



**Lent reflection for March 21, 2024**

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### **Mark 10:17-31**

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. You shall not defraud. Honor your father and mother.’ ” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “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.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the good news who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

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### **Today's Reflection is by Larissa Bailiff**

A bit judgmentally I find myself wondering, “Is this man actually committed to entering the kingdom of God?” He’s already been following the commandments since his youth, why can’t he just give up his earthly possessions?” Jesus, however, acknowledges both how hard (and how rare) it is for the rich to give up their wealth - using the famous “easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle” analogy. This rhetoric is based on extreme opposites, so it’s easy for me to take wealth, here, to mean a group of greedy biblical-era

landowners, the proverbial 1%, who can afford to share their assets but don't. My perspective is quickly reframed, however, by the disciples' anxious question, "then who will be saved,?" and Jesus's clear response that every person is accountable for examining their own relationship to their possessions.

Personally, in my own faith, I am not concerned with what I need to do to enter the heavenly kingdom, but rather whether I am moving through life embodying what I consider Christian values: being a good person, trying to be a better parent, working on my failings, and offering compassion towards others. I think I've got the commandments down. I'll be honest, however, that my attachment to possessions – material or sentimental - is a greyer, more challenging area. This is made more complex by today's expectations of what constitutes basic comfort and society's emphasis on display, status, success, and self-worth, not to mention shopping's instant accessibility. Jesus could not have been more explicit, but most of us aren't ready to give up everything and live in poverty according to his dictum. I'm certainly not.

So, where does this leave me? How do I negotiate this?

This passage invites me to meditate upon what I value and care about most, and to move forward with intentionality and appreciation. Rather than instilling buyer's remorse or an I-can-never-shop-again mentality, it provides an opportunity for ongoing self-examination. It's a prompt to consistently clean out my closets, literally and figuratively, and try to find clarity and meaning within myself, instead of holding too tightly to possessions, money, desires, or even ideas that no longer serve me or spark joy. (Do I sound like Marie Kondo?) Interwoven is the related question of what I can do for others - with my heart, my time, and other resources - not with an all-or-nothing-need-to-give-everything-away attitude, but as a sustained, authentic practice in life.

To me, God offers the grace of reflection and recalibration; the opportunity to change and enact change. God is connection, community, and the lightness of being that comes with giving to and caring for other people (whether one knows them or not). It is the force behind my calling as a teacher and the constant lessons others offer me. God exists in sunsets and spring's return, in memories and unexpected encounters, and watching my children grow. God's love is present in friendship, the visceral power of laughter, and the ability to be truly present in other people's lives, in sweetness and sadness. You can't buy these things on Amazon, and you don't need a storage unit for them.



Originally from Northern California, Larissa has lived in Brooklyn for over two decades. She teaches virtual art history classes for lifelong learners and also gives tours at MoMA. You'll see Larissa at Holy Apostles with her son Evan, and sometimes her daughter Lena will show up for bingo.