

“I keep hearing that money is the root of all evil, and you can’t fit a camel through the eye of a needle...”¹

- Have you heard that song? Maybe not- it’s a country song, and since I tend to listen to more country than anything else
 - I heard this song a number of years ago
 - It’s called, “Buy me a boat,” and sung by Chris Jenson, released in 2015
 - It is funny, and has a great beat, some awesome rhymes in there
 - It starts out, “I ain’t rich, but I want to be.”
 - Then, “I know everybody says money can’t buy happiness..... but it can buy me a boat. And it could buy me a truck to pull it. “
 - Later in the song, and the reason it has made an appearance in the sermon this morning, he sing:
 - “I keep hearing that money is the root of all evil, and you can’t fit a camel through the eye of a needle...”
 - I’m sure that’s probably true, but it still sounds pretty cool!”
 - Cause it can buy me a boat.
 - I’ll link to it in the sermon blog if you have never heard it! It’s worth it
 - And if I can perhaps point to it just a little, and all of the other songs we have out there about money
 - Then I want us to admit, even before we start in to the sermon about the gospel this morning
 - That it is pretty dang relevant to us today. To you and me and the culture and country in which we live
 - 40% of everything Jesus said had to do with money or economic metaphors²
 - And the crazy thing is that for most of it, he is talking to poor fishermen who have left their jobs to follow him- they were not rich at all
 - But they probably wanted to be, just like that song

¹ “Buy me a Boat,” Chris Jenson, (song) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQPjKSve1tQ>

² David B. Howell, Feasting on the Word Year B Volume 4, Pastoral Perspective, p. 166

- And when Jesus does come in contact with someone who is considered rich in the ancient world
- He has a lot to say- a lot that is hard to hear
- A lot that all of us need to consider
- You and I- all of us- are likely quite a bit wealthier than this man who walks up to Jesus
- And we, gathered here today, may even want the same thing- we want to follow Jesus to our best ability
- We want to be saved, that is to be restored to a right relationship with God and our neighbors and rescued from our sin
- Perhaps in our hearts is the same question: What must we do to be saved, Jesus?
- We are after all pretty good people already.
- We have much, much in common with the young man who comes to Jesus in our gospel in Mark today.
- And I would even argue that this passage is about a lot more than simply money.
- We catch up with Jesus and the disciples today, and we are moving pretty sequentially in the Gospel of Mark
 - Jesus has been Transfigured upon the mountain in front of Peter, James, and John in the previous chapter (Mark 9)
 - He has begun teaching them about his death and what this life will cost him, and ultimately them- take up your cross, he said
 - He has taught in scary hyperbole about plucking one's eye out if it causes you to sin- that's not literal now
 - It is for shock value, it is to point to the extent of one's focus, one's whole-heartedness for following Jesus
 - He has picked up a little child, and told them that they are to have faith like this
 - And how do little children have faith? They have it so easily, so unclouded with the worries that life brings
 - They love so quickly, trust God so easily...
 - Their joy consumes their entire being when they see something as simple as a bus, or fire truck, or dog...
 - Jesus said, faith like that.
 - And then the rich young man comes to Jesus, and God bless him he really wants to get this right
 - He runs up to Jesus, and as the version of the Bible called "The Message" says,
 - "a man came running up, and greeted him with great reverence."

- He's an over-achiever, it seems, a perfectionist, and since he was old enough to know better has been following God's commandments
- I think he is coming to Jesus to get some reaffirmation, I think he wants Jesus to tell him, "Good job... you're doing it all!" Wow!
- He asks Jesus his question, "What must I do to get eternal life?"
- "Jesus looked him hard in the eye- and loved him"
- Jesus sees him too- our New Testament reading from Hebrews says, the Word of God is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart
- Jesus, the Word in the flesh, sees him and loves him, and I think at this moment wants him to join the disciples- I think this is an invite
- And Jesus sees what is stopping him from fully embracing this faith, what keeps him from having the child like faith
- What keeps him holding on to the world as it is and unable to work toward the Kingdom that God is bringing about
- Jesus says, you have to get rid of that blockage.
- For this man, Jesus says, he should give everything he has to the poor.
- And for this man, this bright-eyed man who has been working all his life to live right and please God
- It was the one thing he could not do.
- And unlike all of Jesus' enemies who go away angry, this young man left sad. ³
- The Message translates verse 22 like this:
 - "The man's face clouded over. This was the last thing he expected to hear, and he walked off with a heavy heart.
 - He was holding on tight to a lot of things, and not about to let go."
- Afterward, the disciples are shocked. Like we are shocked when we read this anew
 - Jesus tells them this life is hard. What is being asked of them is everything.
 - Jesus says it's easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than a rich person to enter heaven
 - And they react just like I do- then who can be saved?!
 - Because I agree- we are all doomed.
 - And thank God Jesus goes on to say the next verse, and again pulled from the Message translation:
 - "Jesus was blunt: 'No chance at all if you think you can pull it off by yourself."

³ New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Volume VII, Mark 10:17-22 Commentary

- Every chance in the world if you let God do it.””
- Many have tried to work these passages to make them a little easier to hear, a little easier to preach from a pulpit
 - And digest in the pews
 - It's been suggested that maybe the man was dishonest in his business dealings
 - Maybe he was one of the ones who made money by destroying windows houses or something
 - Or maybe that eye of the needle was a gate through which a camel could actually get through if they tried hard enough
 - Maybe.
 - But going down those roads of exegesis, or interpretation, takes away the poignancy of Jesus' words
 - What did Jesus see when he looked hard into the man's eyes?
 - What does Jesus see in my eyes, in your eyes, when we look at him and profess our desire to follow him?
 - And what holds us back?
 - What keeps our hearts and our fists closed and prevents us from living and loving God and each other fully and without reservation?
 - I will tell you that for most people, money is among those things
 - Ask yourself this: how much should I give away?
 - Or better yet, ask yourself, how much is too much to give away?
 - I imagine other things on that list might be intelligence, or education
 - Things that make us feel better than others, or entitled rather than in a position to generosity
 - Perhaps it is our own keeping of the law, our own good works, that we end up tripping over and doing them for our own benefit
 - I don't know what yours is- but from one sinner to another sinner, a life of faith is one of attempting to answer that very question
 - When we look in to Jesus' eyes, and he looks hard into mine and yours
 - All hearts are open, all desires known, and no secrets are hid
 - What does Jesus see us holding on to? What are we unwilling to let go of?
 - What keeps us from entering the Kingdom?
- Thank God for the disciples
 - Thank God they were honest enough to say out loud what everyone is thinking
 - If that man cannot enter the Kingdom of God, then who can?? It's hopeless

- I imagine them looking at the rich man who just went away sad and realizing he was a good man, a righteous man
- One who followed God's law and still made a lot of money- nothing wrong with that
- In fact, I wonder if the disciples, and certainly the people living at the time, did not believe that perhaps God had blessed the man with riches
- A tempting and false version of the gospel Jesus came to proclaim called prosperity Gospel
- The disciples had given up everything and were now wondering if that was enough
- And Jesus gives hope:
 - You don't have "a chance at all if you think you can pull it off by yourself. " he says.
 - But "Every chance in the world if you let God do it."
- I think that, as we go through life, we given things and told to hold onto them
 - We are told to hold tight, don't let someone take it, protect it, guard it- whatever that might be
 - And as we grow up, we grab ahold of those things, and we keep our fists tight
 - And we look at others with suspicion that they are going to try and steal it
 - And we turn into some modern day version of Gollum in Lord of the Rings holding on to his precious while it rots him from the inside out
 - We all want that boat, with a truck to pull it, believing there is solace in it.
 - But in direct contrast to everything we are told to hold onto, everything we are told will make us happy, bring us peace, keep us safe
 - Jesus says that the only way to really live fully, to really love fully, to be fully present to those around us...
 - Is to start practicing letting go.
 - That in giving is when we will receive.
 - Practice opening our hearts. And maybe our wallets too- we know they are connected
 - Holding on to- putting our trust in earthly things to make us happy and give us purpose- will finally fail us.
 - Instead, it is Jesus and his father who can call to us deep into our hearts, look hard into our eyes, and bring us that joy and peace.

Amen