

**“THE IMPOSSIBLE MADE POSSIBLE”**  
**Mk 10:23-31; Eccl 5:10-20; Heb 4:1-16**

Last week we heard about a rich young synagogue ruler who came to Jesus wanting to know how to inherit eternal life, but discovered that the price was too high in his estimation, and so he went away sad. Today’s Gospel is a continuation of that account. This, now, is Jesus’ teaching to his disciples as this man walks away—this man whom Jesus look on and loved and hoped he’d change his mind and come back.

“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God...” And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?”

I lost a button on my shirt last week and had to sew it back on. With these over 60-year-old eyes, I have trouble getting even a tiny piece of thread through the eye of a needle! So getting a camel to pass through the eye of a needle seems to be clearly an impossibility.

Someone in our Bible Class “Googled” it this past week and we discovered that the average weight of a camel is around 1,000 pounds; its average height is seven feet tall. Now the eye of a normal sewing needle is measured in millimeters. So obviously, a camel isn’t getting through there.

In response to the disciples’ question, Then who can be saved? Jesus says, With man it is impossible... In fact, I suspect that the only way to get a camel through the eye of an needle is to feed the camel through the needle hair by hair, bit by bit. It would take forever, and even then, would you have a camel left after all that? Not really. Just a bunch a shredded camel. Because the only way that camel is getting through that needle is to die.

Well, if that’s easier than getting into heaven... Then who can be saved? the disciples want to know. Because Jesus said the same kind of thing about us, when He said elsewhere: Strive to enter through the narrow door. You’ll have just as much trouble as a camel. So to get you through, you’ll have to die, too? Indeed!

But what good is being saved if you’re just a saved corpse? Then you’re just like that camel - what winds up on the other side is nothing like what started. Torn apart to be squeezed through the eye of the needle.

But wait! Jesus said that only about the rich, right? Well, no, because a few verses later He says, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God (period!).” Now it’s not just the rich, but Jesus widens things to include everyone. So, to get through, to enter the kingdom of God, you’ll have to die, too? Is that what Jesus is suggesting? Yes.

But we don’t want to die. Death isn’t what we were designed to do. Death is a result of sin. God created us to live. So we try to live. We look for life. We look for life in all kinds of things in this world. And wealth is one of those things. Money can get me what I want. Money will... improve my life... buy the best doctors... fund the latest medical research... get the best treatments... make me live longer... And certainly happier, right? Happier than those who don’t have it; than those panhandlers we see down by Lowe’s and Walmart, right?

Well, Solomon thought so. Solomon who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes, which we heard from today. King Solomon, who was far more wealthy than we'll ever be. Solomon had it made... until he didn't. Until he realized that his wealth didn't give him, (couldn't give him), what he wanted. He wasn't happy. The richer he got, the more miserable he got, the more people became fake friends just to get his money. He lost sleep. He worked hard, but for all that, he didn't have the life he wanted. He was staring death in the face, and his wealth couldn't help him. He realized that as he came from his mother's womb, he would go again, naked as he came, and would take nothing for his toil that he could carry away in his hand. He realized that money makes a really lousy god. He called it a grievous evil.

He was right! When your wealth becomes your god, it is a grievous evil if it keeps you out of the kingdom of God.

But just like with the rich man last week, so too for us, the wealth of this world, the things of this world, are so hard to let go of. We hold onto the things of this world with white knuckles. Whether that wealth is a wealth of the riches of the world, the admiration of the world, the popularity of the world, the power of the world, the acceptance of the world. Life is easier when you have those things, with the world on your side, and much harder if you don't.

Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! Jesus said. Difficult in Jesus' day... Difficult for those early Christians who were persecuted and martyred. And difficult today. Easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle!

So again: Does this mean that to get you through, to enter the kingdom of God, you'll have to die, too? Yes.

And then your wealth can't help you, your friends can't help you, your power or whatever else you have can't help you. As Solomon said, that all gets left behind. When you die, there's only one who can help you: the one who came and died with you. The one who came and died for you. That He be that one on the other side of the needle's eye who could bring to life again. Who could raise that camel back to life. Who could raise you to life again. So that you would enter the kingdom of God alive. So that you would have hope.

That's what Jesus came to do, and did. He wanted that rich man to follow Him to the cross and witness His death and resurrection, and see how he would inherit eternal life. And He wants you to do the same. To find your life not in anything in this world, not in all the things that can't give you life, but to find your life only in Him who died and rose to life again, and who promised the same for you.

So for you who must die, Jesus baptized you into His death and resurrection...to get your eye-threading death and other-side-of-the-needle resurrection over with. To give you life already here and now in the kingdom of God. That's how great baptism is. It gives you everything you need - the forgiveness of your sins, eternal life, the kingdom of God - everything! Promise after promise after promise. Gift after gift after gift.

But you realize what we keep doing? In baptism, Jesus has brought us through the eye of the needle with Himself, through His death and into a new life in the kingdom of God... but what do we keep doing? We keep reaching back through the needle for the things of this world!

Thank you Jesus, but I really need this. I really want that. I know what you said, but... Can't I just have this too? And maybe it's just one part of us that squeezes back through first, but then another, and another, until we've squeezed back through the needle to death in this world? That doesn't make any sense! And yet... do you see yourself reaching back, grasping, and coveting...?

So Jesus calls us to repent. To drop whatever it is we've reached back through the needle for this week. To drop it here, to drop it at the altar, to drop it at the foot of the cross, and confess. Why did I do that? My life's here, not there. Forgive me. And Jesus pulls us back through the needle again. I forgive you, He says.

And then He holds out His Body and Blood and says: here. Reach for this instead. Reach for what gives you life, and strengthens you in this life. The food and drink of eternal life. Don't reach back, reach forward. Take and eat.

Live in this world but don't find your life in this world. Enjoy the things of this world but don't find your life or hope in them. I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. And I'll provide all you need, Jesus promises.

And that's what Jesus tells Peter. Because Peter says: See, we've left everything and followed you. And they did. Peter, Andrew, James, and John all left their fishing business. Matthew left his tax collecting career. All of them left something behind... family and friends - Peter had a mother-in-law that Jesus healed so we know he at least had a wife. Maybe a family. And Jesus says in response: whatever you've left, I'll give you more. But it won't be easy. You'll have persecutions, too, here and now. From the evil one who hates you and a world that disagrees with you, trying to pull you back through the needle to their side, the side of death. They'll make it feel like, and they'll try to get you to think that I'm the one taking life away from you! But the very opposite is true. That's what they're doing. I'm giving a life that will never end. Life that only comes on the other side of the needle. So don't listen to them. Follow ME... To the cross, through the cross, to life again.

So as we heard in the Epistle from Hebrews: Since... we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. Hold fast to the one who made it through death, through the eye of the needle and rose to life again. Hold fast to Him and don't reach back through the needle! "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are... tempted to stay on this side of the needle, or tempted to reach back through the needle, ...yet without sin... Yet He didn't. He made it. For you. ...Let us then with confidence... - in Him and what He has done - Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace... drawing near in repentance, dropping all that we've reached for this week, that we may grab hold of ...mercy... that is, Jesus, ...and find grace to help in time of need. Grabbing hold of Jesus who has grabbed hold of you and pulled you through the needle to eternal life.

Impossible for you, but not only possible for Jesus, God made flesh, our great High Priest. It's not only possible, but finished. Accomplished. For you. It is finished. So that you have life on the other side of the needle. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.