

**THE HEBREW SCRIPTURE:** Exodus 20:1-17 (NRSV)

**20** Then God spoke all these words:

<sup>2</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>3</sup> you shall have no other gods before<sup>[a]</sup> me.

<sup>4</sup> You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation<sup>[b]</sup> of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup> You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

<sup>8</sup> Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>10</sup> But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

<sup>12</sup> Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> You shall not murder.<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>14</sup> You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

**Footnotes:**

- a. [Exodus 20:3](#) Or *besides*
- b. [Exodus 20:6](#) Or *to thousands*
- c. [Exodus 20:13](#) Or *kill*

**\*THE GOSPEL LESSON**

**Mark 10:17-31**

**10** <sup>17</sup> 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?" <sup>18</sup> Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. <sup>19</sup> 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.'" <sup>20</sup> He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." <sup>21</sup> Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and

give the money<sup>[a]</sup> to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." <sup>22</sup>When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

<sup>23</sup>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!" <sup>24</sup>And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is<sup>[b]</sup> to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup>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." <sup>26</sup>They were greatly astounded and said to one another,<sup>[c]</sup> "Then who can be saved?" <sup>27</sup>Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

<sup>28</sup>Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." <sup>29</sup>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,<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>30</sup>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. <sup>31</sup>But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

Footnotes:

- a. [Mark 10:21](#) Gk lacks *the money*, b. [Mark 10:24](#) Other ancient authorities add *for those who trust in riches*
- c. [Mark 10:26](#) Other ancient authorities read *to him*, d. [Mark 10:29](#) Or *gospel*

**Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.**

**People: Praise to you, Lord Christ.**

The story that we heard from Mark this morning is often called "The Story of the Rich Young Man". Perhaps I would rename it "The Story of the Overachiever". "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" he asks as he races to catch Jesus before Jesus heads out on another journey.

Perhaps the man hadn't heard that Jesus was in town until it was almost too late. You can almost hear his buddy say to him, "Hey man, if you want to talk to him, you'd better get a move on it; he's about to leave town!"

It was so important to the Rich Young Overachiever to hear Jesus' answer to his question that he ran to catch Jesus and then blurted out his question. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" There he is, kneeling in front of Jesus, effectively blocking Jesus' exit—the answer for this man is *that* important!

It makes me wonder, *how long* had he been wondering this? How long had he contemplated this? How hard he must be trying to do the right thing! How *eager* he must be to please God! The Rich... Young... Overachiever!

So Jesus, like good Jewish teachers all the way back to Moses, directs our Rich Young Overachiever to the 10 Commandments—focusing on the ones that have to do with our relationship with one another. "Don't murder; don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness, don't defraud, honor your father and mother." No small tasks! The 10 Commandments are *hard*! But the Rich

Young Overachiever in all of his earnestness assures Jesus that he has, indeed, fulfilled these commandments *all his life*—and Jesus, looks into his face and sees this to be true. It says in our Scripture that Jesus “looked at him and loved him”.

Our fellow who went to see Jesus -- this guy that I really like -- was following every rule that he knew. In fact, he had slam dunked the Big Top 10! How many of us can look at these rules and say that we have not broken even one of them. But our guy? He's Olga Korbut! He's Nadia Comaneci! He's Mark Spitz!

Okay, I'm showing my age and you may have no idea who these people are; but what I'm trying to say is that he's the Valedictorian of his class. We *all* wish we could be him -- he's that good at scoring on the test. He's going to get that scholarship to college -- which, of course, he doesn't need because? He's rich!

He's not the obnoxious rich guy. He's not the "look at my mansion", "look at my yacht", "look at all my servants waiting on me hand and foot while I sit around barking orders" rich guy. No. He's the really earnest rich guy who is trying really hard. He knows the rules. And he has -- aced them!

So, Jesus, looks at this young man and our scripture tells us that he loved the good young man in front of him whose earnestness was written on his face. Whose face must have been saying to Jesus, “What else, Lord? What else is needed of me? What else can I do?”

It made Jesus stop...and really look at him...and look through him...to his very heart. Because we hear that Jesus "loved him" and then he responds, saying, “You lack one thing...Go, sell everything you own...and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

So, let's just stop there for a second. One hot minute. And consider what Jesus was asking of him.

Had Jesus asked him to fast from eating, I'm sure he would have asked only, “How long?”

If Jesus had asked him to climb a mountain, he would have asked only, “How high?”

If Jesus had told him to take a walk in the desert, he would have asked only, “How many days?”

But, “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor.” Oh dear! Our dear fellow hadn't anticipated that! And we are told that, he was shocked and went away grieving -- or, in some translations, it would read that “*His face fell*” and that he “went away sad, because he had great wealth.”

We never know what his final decision is—because Scripture doesn't tell us—but we do know he had a lot to think about when he left that day—perhaps more than he had bargained for...

This got me to thinking. I suspect for many—if not most—people who might have greeted Jesus in such a way as our rich young man had *that* day—that Jesus might just have given the same answer about the Commandments. These commandments were good enough for their -- our faith -- ancestors and, as far as Jesus was concerned, they were still a good line in the sand. *Do these things...and do not do those things.* What does God expect?

These things; not those things. I'd say what Jesus was giving was the baseline of things that would *please God.*

But his next move is what really catches my attention. He *looks at him* and *loves him...*and then tells him what is *hindering* his relationship with God. What *specifically for this young man* was hindering his relationship *with God.* For this young man it was his *wealth.* His ability to rely on his own resources. The prestige he had for being among the wealthy. The respect that he got from others because he had wealth.

*Money matters.* If our wealth separates us from others -- then it affects our relationship with God. The "abundant life" that Jesus said he has come to give - - has nothing to do with *wealth.* It has everything to do with being *dependent on God and in communion with one another.* And yet, here is this earnest *rich man!*

A man of *this man's* character would make a fine disciple, Jesus decides. This is exactly the challenge --the stretch -- that this Rich Young Overachiever needs. When Jesus says to him to sell everything, he is saying to him, "my disciples follow me with little in their possession, little enough that we all depend on the generosity of others."

This rich young man? *Didn't* have to trust others. *Didn't* have to rely on others. *Didn't* have to *trust God*; *didn't* have to *rely* on God when the going got tough—because *he had wealth to catch him.*

So, Jesus pulls off the band aid and gives it to him straight. "The thing that hinders your relationship with God is your wealth. Give...it...up."

It was a lot to ask. "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," says Jesus. And the man walks away sad.

You know what? I suppose, if we asked Jesus the same question the rich young man asked about how to inherit the kingdom of heaven, he might quote the 10 Commandments to us. Those ten challenges alone could keep us busy for our whole life!

But, let's say, that we're pretty good at them. Let's say that we kind of have those 10 under our belt. Maybe we're not *black* belt on the 10 Commandments, but we're at least *brown* belt. And we look at Jesus as the rich young man did,

and ask, "What *else*, Lord? What else is required...of me?" Wouldn't Jesus look at us with love, too?

Sure he would! And then, I do really believe he would have a *specific instruction personally crafted for each of us*, too.

It may not be *the same* for us as it was for the young man. Our specific instruction *might be different*. That "*thing*" that hinders us *might be different*. *Wealth* may *not* be our problem—although I'd venture to say that many of us in this culture have an unhealthy relationship with our "things".

I mean, I think *I* have a pretty good level of detachment from my "things"; I feel like I could walk away from most of my "things" tomorrow.

So why is it I still can't seem to empty out those last six boxes that have followed me from Seminary to the Catskills to Connecticut, back to Long Island, and back to Connecticut again?

Every time I pick up "this" or "that" out of one of those boxes, I think, "I want this" or "I might need that" or "I should save this" even though I haven't used any of it in 15 years and—standing before you this morning—I cannot tell you one thing in this moment that is in those six boxes.

But even if wealth or possession isn't our problem, wouldn't we *still* say to Jesus, "*What else, Lord?*" "What else hinders my relationship with God?" "What else must I let go of...or take up?"

What hinders my relationship with God? What hinders yours?

Let's take the next few moments in prayerful reflection and ask God what it is that is hindering your relationship with God?

Is it one of the 10 Commandments?

Is it wealth?

Possessions?

Is it clutter?

Busyness?

An addiction?

Is it a failure of forgiveness?...

*Change* can be a messy and difficult business—but that which hinders our relationship with God? Is messier.

Think about what Jesus said about threading a needle!

When was the last time *you* threaded a needle?

I know when the last time I needed to. I was in Switzerland to scatter the ashes of a dear relative. And, if you can imagine, in my limited wardrobe, two buttons popped off on shirt. And I needed to sew those two buttons back on, because it was all I had to wear.

Just getting that little tiny thread through the eye of a needle was messy enough! Please do not ask me what I said in those minutes! Still, minutes of

huffing and puffing later, I pushed that splayed and flattened thread through the *eye of that needle*.

Yet what did Jesus say? "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." For our rich young man and for many of us in the United States, wealth, or comfortable income – can be a hindrance -- something that keeps us from having to rely solely on God.

What hinders your relationship to God? What in *your life* is like trying to shove a big ol' camel through the eye of that needle?

Change can be messy—but Jesus says that, what hinders us is *messier*.

Someone once said, "A year from now you will wish you had started today." (*Karen Lamb, founder and director of Motions for Change*). What is holding you back?

Maya Angelou once said, "Someone was hurt before you, wronged before you, hungry before you, frightened before you, beaten before you, humiliated before you... yet, someone survived... You can do anything you choose to do." What do you think?

Someone else once said, that you are "never too old, never too bad, never too late, never too sick to start from scratch once again." (*Bikram Choudhury, founder of Bikram Yoga*).

Do you believe that? I do. Because, I believe the promise of Scripture that "With God, all things are possible." I am "never too old, never too bad, never too late, never too sick to start from scratch once again."

Jesus promised that whoever made a great sacrifice to follow him would, in turn, be blessed a hundred-fold. Sometimes I'm not so sure I would say that the blessing I receive feels like 100 fold. Still, do we trust that God has something better waiting for us if we put down what is hindering us? Some blessing greater than the one we live in today?

Maybe it sounds silly to you, but I believe it. And even in my baby steps, I experience it. So, here's to baby steps! Here's to giant leaps! May your journey with Christ be unhindered that you might experience a 100-fold of blessings today—and every day of your life.

Blessings on the journey. Amen.

*Final 3 Quotes from: <http://exploreforayear.com/clarity/45-inspiring-quotes-change>*