

### 10.10.21 L28P20 Camels, Riches, and God's Kingdom

- It seemed like everywhere we went in Israel, street vendors were trying to sell us stuff – persistent, nagging, almost rude, they never gave up calling out prices, and trying to make a deal
  - The sidewalk sellers tried to sell us jewelry, they tried to sell us colorful scarves, they tried to sell us cute little stuffed camels – and finally, Mary bought two little stuffed camels for our two grandchildren
  - But at the end of the trip, we finally got to see REAL camels, and let me tell you – *they are not cute!*
  - Camels are big, they are cranky, they smell, and they lurch up from kneeling to standing, and walk very awkwardly
  - So when Jesus said, “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 [Mark 10:25]” – when Jesus said that, the people who heard him must have smiled at the ridiculous idea of a smelly, awkward camel trying to squeeze through the eye of a camel... they must have smiles UNLESS they happened to be a rich person
- And compared to rich people then, today's wealthy folks have almost unimagined wealth
  - In Jesus' day, who would have imagined that a father would pay \$28 million for his eighteen-year-old son to ride up to the very edge of space with Jeff Bezos, the richest man in the world, on an eleven-minute ride in his reusable Blue Origin rocket?
  - Or there is Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook – Facebook crashed for several hours this week, throwing some folks into a panic while others observed that the world did just fine without Facebook – Zuckerberg who is only the fifth richest person in the world, has an estimated wealth of \$97 BILLION dollars.
  - Or there is the unimagined wealth of the rich and famous, with a scandalous report hitting the news last week that revealed the places where thousands of extremely wealthy people hid their money so that like cheapskates, they would not have to pay taxes to any country

- It's easy to hear the story of the camel and the eye of the needle and point to the super-rich in Jesus' day and our day
  - But this week I found an online calculator where you can plug in the number of people in your household and your income, and it tells you where you rank in the world
  - It showed that I am in the **97<sup>th</sup> percentile** of the world!
  - Some of you are a few percent below me, and some of you are percent or two above me, but from a global perspective, WE – WE are wealthy!
- And now it's a lot harder to smile at the grumpy, stubborn camel trying and failing to fit through the eye of a needle
- But today's gospel reading is not only about money, it is also about love
  - In the gospel reading a man had come up to Jesus and asked him what he had to do to inherit eternal life, and Jesus referred the man to the commandments
  - This man was apparently an honorable person who had lived by, and kept the commandments his whole life long
  - And then we hear this: "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. [Mark 10:21-211]"
  - The problem, though, was NOT his wealth. The man's problem was his lack of love
  - He loved his wealth more than Jesus, AND he loved his money more than his neighbors.
  - And now, what about us?
- Jesus looked at the man with love, and Jesus looks at us with love too.
- Hearing about the big camel and the little eye of a needle, the crowd in Jesus' day wondered who could even be saved. But then Jesus said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible. [10:27]"
  - With God, all things are possible
  - In Jesus, God has shown that nothing is impossible – it is possible for even sinful commandment-breakers to be welcomed into God's kingdom, and even for the dead to be raised to life!

- But in this life, Jesus taught the man, and he teaches us, that money NEEDS to be connected to love
- As Christians, as followers of Jesus, our lives need to tell a different and better story than the super-rich who ride rockets for eleven-minutes junkets, or who hide their huge wealth so that they don't pay taxes to support their countries, and their fellow citizens
- Today we can remember and be inspired by a very different and better story of discipleship
- Early this afternoon a handful of people will bring their pets and fur-friends to the covered walkway outside the front door, and there, in the tradition of Saint Francis of Assisi we will listen to scripture about God's care for creatures, give thanks for companion pets, and bless the animals
  - Loving animals and caring for creation – that's one thing that Saint Francis who lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and whose day of commemoration was this past Monday, is famous for
  - But we ALSO need to remember the other thing that Francis is famous for, and that was his wealth... and his poverty
  - Francis was born into a wealthy family, and by all accounts he was a spoiled and wild young man who was looking for fame and fortune in battle
  - But something happened – God turned his life around through a series of dreams and encounters, and then Francis offended his father by selling some of his family's property and giving the money it to the poor
  - After being disowned by his father for giving away some of his wealth to the poor, Francis himself sold everything he had and became poor, began preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ, and gathered a following of people committed to loving and serving others
- Loving God, and loving and serving others – this is the life of discipleship to which all of us have been called by the God who first loves us, and through whom all things are possible, even if we do not sell everything like Saint Francis
  - No one can earn their way into God's kingdom any more than a stubborn, smelly camel can squeeze through the eye of a needle – after all, God in Jesus Christ loves

us, and the cross and empty tomb tell us that all things are possible with God

- But now our money is not a problem, but instead, our relative wealth is an opportunity – our money and resources can be used in love to care not only for ourselves, and not only for our families and friends, but also for people who we will never meet – people who need food and shelter, and medicine and vaccines
- So we are called to live generously each day, and with a will we can even die generously, all because God loves us, and we have been set free from sin and death to love God, and to love our neighbors