

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Rockefeller Camels

Sermon Reflection Notes

The Gospel Lesson for today is a story about the way Jesus invites people into a transformative life. When Jesus is asked by the “rich young ruler” what was needed to inherit eternal life, Jesus reminded him that he knew the commandments of God. When the man responded with great confidence that he followed the commandments, Jesus looked at the man, saw him clearly, and loved him. And then Jesus basically said, “Well, that’s a good beginning, but you lack one thing.” The man asked what else was needed; Jesus answered him and turned everything upside down. Jesus invited him to let go of his addiction to his wealth, his addiction to fear, his addiction to his own self-interest, his addiction to all the ways he was enslaved. The rich young ruler went away with sadness, maybe because he was resisting transformation and change, maybe because he knew how difficult it would be to give up everything. He was heavily invested in the way he had his life arranged. Where would he even start?

And then Jesus turned to his disciples and said that the work of transformation is hard and costly. The work of transformation is impossible – for us. But it is not impossible with God! With God, a baby was born to old Sarah and Abraham; slaves broke free from Pharaoh; a Friday death was broken open by Easter; and on and on and on. But, we say, the world is still impossible. Peace in the middle east, peace in our nation, peace among races, peace in our churches, peace in our families...seemingly impossible. We’ve tried again and again. But with God???

We ask, like the man asked Jesus, what must we do to inherit eternal life? But we ask the wrong question. We need to forget the ‘doing’ and accept that grace is a gift, not an entitlement or an earning. We sometimes focus on what we need to ‘give up,’ the stuff, the money, the privilege, the things we cherish for whatever reason. Instead, we could choose to focus on making room to accept the big gift, the transformative gift, offered to us freely.

We don’t really need to turn away with sadness when we hear this story. The word of the gospel is big and strong. God is among us, doing the impossible work of transformation – making all things new. Can we allow ourselves to imagine it? Can we step outside the carefully ordered worlds we have built for ourselves into God’s upside down creation? Can we find the freedom from the things that bind us so that we might have more room for the totality of God’s goodness and grace? We alone cannot—but God can.

Scripture

Mark 10:17-31 (NRSVUE)

¹⁷ 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?” ¹⁸ Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ 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.’ ” ²⁰ He said to him, “Teacher, I have

kept all these since my youth.”²¹ 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.”²² When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³ 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!”²⁴ 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!²⁵ 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.”²⁶ They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?”²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

²⁸ Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”²⁹ 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 news³⁰ 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.³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

Discussion Questions

1. Talk about why this scripture passage tends to make us uncomfortable.
2. Jesus presents a paradoxical system when he answers the man’s question. Jesus reiterates his point when the disciples need validation that they *have* done what he asked. Describe/explain the paradoxical system Jesus talks about.
3. Why do you think Pastor Ron titled this sermon “Rockefeller Camels”? (*We don’t actually know the answer; we just want to hear your thoughts!*)
4. Pastor Ron said in the sermon, “Jesus didn’t dismiss this man or his question. Rather, he saw him and loved him. He looked deep inside his soul and said there is one thing you lack.” What’s the significance of the phrase: “Jesus looked at him and loved him”?
5. Inheritance is a gift, not an entitlement. And yet we ask: “What must we do to inherit eternal life?” What’s the answer to our question?
6. What impediments keep us from accepting what God offers freely? What keeps us from loving God with our whole hearts?
 - How do we set those things aside and let them go?

Closing Prayer

Holy God, sometimes the question haunts us: “What must we do to be saved, to go to heaven, to love you?” And then we are surprised once more to learn that it is not our *doing* that makes us free, that makes you love us, that checks off our ticket to heaven. It is, instead, your love for us that knows no bounds, that frees us for service to you and to each other, that includes us in your family. Help us to accept that freedom and grace, to respond with gratitude, and to love each other with acts of compassion and justice. Replace our worry and guilt with hearts that are free to share graciously with those who need our gifts. We pray in the name of Jesus, who told the stories of our life with truth and love. Amen.

“The upside down realm of God is about accumulating everlasting life by giving things away.”