

Sermon Notes: October 10, 2021

Focus: Money and Power, Mark 10

[Lectionary Readings](#)

A man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ... 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.

You know the golden rule: they who have the gold make the rules. It is extremely easy to hear Jesus talking about money and power only for 5-billion-dollar rocket men like Jeff Bezos. The harder and maybe better part of the story is the context. Jesus talks to the man and sees what the man really needs. When money, privilege, and patronage warp how he engaged the world, he (we) might need to leverage that privilege for those who can't repay us.

Jesus loved the man. He did ask him not to bury or burn his wealth as a sign of dramatic commitment – we will leave that to St. Francis. I think if Jesus had said burn all your stuff in the city square, that would have been less challenging because the man would have become a spiritual celebrity. Jesus *did* ask him to lose agency over his wealth. This act would have placed him at the center of a new community that Jesus was creating. The story is shocking and frustrating maybe because it asks too much of us. It asks us to consider how letting go of privilege might help us put our feet on the ground.

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

There are no loopholes. This kind of generosity is miraculous: miracle driven. At the same time, you've probably heard a camel sermon that goes something like this: Jesus was likely referring to gate called “the eye of the needle” in Jerusalem and camel could not get through the gate. So...free pass. To my knowledge, there is no gate. It was a medieval story pulled out of the air to blunt the edges of this encounter with Jesus. This story does not include loopholes or gates, but does include impossibilities and miracles.

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

I hear and feel Peter's frustration and chaffing because he knew how impossible Jesus was being. Here is what I know. This reading is the only time in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus is explicitly described as loving someone. His invitation was tailored to this man's spiritual vitality. The invitation to give his stuff to the poor would allow the man to flourish in this new community Jesus was creating. If the man took Jesus' offer, he would have lost social capital. He would no longer be able to participate in the patronage game. He would lose control over his destiny. He would be part of an impossible community of equality.

Money and power are **not** corrupt or evil, but they can be a miracle when God asks you to bless others.

Todd