

19th After Trinity Sermon - Seek God and Live

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15, Hebrews 4:12-16, Mark 10:17-31

Once upon a time, there was a diamond expert, who was sat on a plane beside a woman with a huge diamond on her finger. He introduced himself to her and said, "I couldn't help but notice your beautiful diamond. I am an expert in precious stones. Please tell me about that stone." She replied, "This is the famous Klopman diamond, one of the finest diamonds in the world. But there is a strange curse that comes with it." Now the expert was really interested. He asked, "What is the curse?" As he waited with bated breath, she replied, "Mr. Klopman."

Some of us may wish to re-evaluate our diamonds on that basis, but seriously the true curse of any kind of valuable possession is its capacity to steal our hearts and souls; for our possessions to become more important than anything else.

The rich young ruler from our Gospel reading is one of those unique characters from the Bible that have come to represent greed. So unwilling was he to part with earthly wealth that he sold his soul in order to keep his money. He wanted to be saved but not at the expense of losing his possessions.

What impresses me here is that he was so near to the Kingdom. He asked all the right questions. He understood the Law and he understood Jesus' teaching. But in the end love of money kept him out.

Nevertheless he has qualities:

- Firstly he was courageous. He came up to Jesus with a direct question – how may I be saved?
- Secondly he was humble and knew that Jesus was good, better than he could ever be

- Thirdly he was religious and kept to the letter of the law. Perfect Churchgoer!

On the other hand there were negatives:

- He was looking for a rule to keep – he thought obeying rules brought salvation.
- And of course, he loved his money and his things.
- And then he walked away! He didn't find a satisfactory answer to 'What must I do?' that he wanted to hear or contemplate. Why did he not stay and talk it through with Jesus and argue his case?

But despite these negatives, Jesus saw the good bits in him for Mark tells us that Jesus looked upon him and loved him. How comforting is that? To know that Jesus looks at us and just loves us, despite ourselves? He know us – each one of us, our motives, our intentions, where our true heart lies and where we place our love of God in a list of loves.

Jesus said it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

These words have usually provoked two kinds of reactions. One interpretation is that you had better give up your money or you are lost. Therefore, if you want to be in the kingdom, give your money away and go off and join a monastery. The other perspective is that Jesus' words apply only to the rich. And since you're not rich, they don't apply to you.

Neither interpretation is good enough. The first seems like an invitation to economic disaster. The second is evasive – its for other people not me!

Discussions and debates about who is rich and who is not miss the point. The rich are those with enough money to be afraid of losing it. Jesus' words urge us to look not at the amount of money we have but rather at the role money plays in our lives. What is our attitude toward riches and wealth? If we have enough money so that we are afraid to lose it, then we are probably rich and we are partners with this rich man; then it is probably easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for us to enter the kingdom of God.

More than anything else in our world, our money and how we use it reflects our deepest values and commitments. Look at how people spend their money and you will see their gods.

Just like the people Amos was writing about – all the ritual happened, but on the cheap and with no involvement of the heart.

We know Jesus' demand is impossible to keep. If this is what it takes to be a disciple, if this is what it takes to be saved, then no one is saved. Then no one is worthy of being a disciple. And that is precisely the point Jesus is trying to make -- to the rich young ruler, to his disciples, and to us! As long as we ask, "What do I have to do?" as long as we think that our deeds or our money or our church attendance will count for something, as long as we think we can do something to win God's approval, then we are stuck. Then we are like that camel stuck in the eye of the needle. Then we are like that rich young ruler who walked away from Jesus because it was impossible for him to give away his gods and trust Jesus. When we come to this realisation, Jesus has got us just where he wants us – a point of complete trust.

Hebrews talks about the word of God being like a two edged sword, dividing soul from spirit – God knows us inside out! Every

part of us – the real us part from the us we show to the world, reality from unreality, truth from lies, like the Gok Wan programme where you stand naked, so he can dress you to look better, so we are before God – nothing hidden, warts and all. Liberating, you can be yourself with God – no hidden agendas because God KNOWS and he still loves you and he clothes you in righteousness.

And THEN we begin to find ourselves doing wonderful and marvellous things, even miracles. Suddenly camels pass through the eyes of needles. And people who live in a world where money means everything are suddenly able to do things with money that seem strange to the rest of the world.

Because, dare I say it: there is no needle too small with an eye too tiny through which the grace of God cannot pull us. When God's spirit is in us, there is no going back. This is something that lasts forever. It will never wear out. Our salvation will never need to be repeated, as if somehow it didn't work the first time. And when we let God love us like this, life changes. It can no longer be business as usual.

He may or may not be asking you to sell our possessions – only you know that in your heart, but what he is definitely asking all of us is that nothing is above the love that we have for him, nothing is above the importance of faith in Jesus. He know us, we can approach him and his throne of Grace with boldness, just like the rich man, but we approach knowing that we can receive mercy and grace, forgiveness and understanding for who we really are, knowing that he looks on us and loves us despite our weaknesses.

Our diamond is Jesus – he brings life abundant, no downside, no curse, only good stuff – grace, mercy, peace, life eternal and joy unbounded. Seek God first that you may live.