

## Gospel lesson

Once again, we keep reading from the Gospel of Mark, picking up right from where we left off last week:



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/lumo-rich-man/>; credit: LUMO

### Mark 10:17-31

(NRSV)

<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 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 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, "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>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."

*The word of God for the people of God*

<Children's time>

<Hymn "My Faith Looks Up to Thee"

UMH #452>

## Message: Needles and Camels



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/walking-with-jesus/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Gracious Lord of infinite capabilities,  
as we take time now to further consider today's  
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may trust in Your grace even in impossible  
situations. Amen.

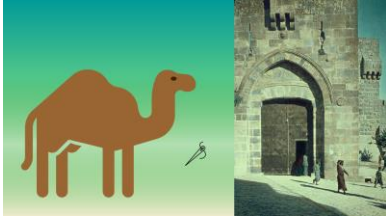
We continue "Walking with Jesus," encountering  
"Needles and Camels":

"[T]oday's Gospel reading offers a lot of potential  
... potential for engagement, potential for  
exploring the meaning of generosity, and the  
potential for tying ourselves up in interpretive  
and linguistic knots!"<sup>1</sup>

<Interactive Time>

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<sup>1</sup> Theme summary taken from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/walking-with-jesus>.



picture from personal creation;  
picture on right from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jerusalem.\\_Jaffa\\_Gate.\\_Needle%27s\\_eye.\\_Matt.\\_19-24\\_LOC\\_matpc.22730.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jerusalem._Jaffa_Gate._Needle%27s_eye._Matt._19-24_LOC_matpc.22730.jpg);  
Jaffa gate, Jerusalem

What do you picture when Jesus talks about a camel fitting through the eye of the needle?

<Let them respond>

What does that mean for us today? <Let them respond>

Anselm of Canterbury has been cited as saying,

“...at Jerusalem there was a certain gate, called, The needle’s eye, through which a camel could not pass, but on its bended knees, and after its burden had been taken off; and so the rich should not be able to pass along the narrow way that leads to life, till he had put off the burden of sin, and of riches, that is, ceasing to love them.”<sup>2</sup>

How does that change the meaning of what Jesus said for you? <Let them respond>

Anselm wrote in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, over a millennium after the Gospel was written. There is no earlier evidence describing that name for such a gate. So it may be, after all, that Jesus meant an actual sewing needle’s eye – that it is truly impossible for us without God’s intervention, not

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<sup>2</sup> <https://classictheology.org/2021/10/12/through-the-eye-of-an-actual-needle-the-fake-gate-theory/>

merely a matter of our choosing to live righteously. Which meaning of what Jesus said resonates more for you? <Let them respond>

Biblical study takes time and care to understand the culture of the day in which it was written, in order to translate the message into the culture of today. Sometimes scholars have excellent insights; other times they may be off a bit in their interpretation, colored by their own prejudices and concerns.

I have been learning that in my studies. In one of my current classes, we have been studying Genesis. We discussed how even though male and female were created as equals, patriarchal scholars have long interpreted it with a prejudice to subjugating women under men, treating them worse than brood mares.

A statement the instructor made which really stood out to me is that right from the garden of Eden, independent of anything from the New Testament or even from later books in the Old Testament, “God’s greatest concern seems to be: how do we encourage the life and livelihood of one another?”<sup>3</sup>



*picture screencaptured from  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GswSq2ohqmA>;  
video credit: BibleProject*

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<sup>3</sup> Norton, Yolanda M., BI 101 VT “Introduction to the Hebrew Bible,” Wesley Theological Seminary, Fall 2024, 10/7/2024 class discussion.

With that concern in mind, let us consider the story of Job, from which we are getting snippets this month. Today's reading comes from the main body of the book, in which Job's three friends argued with him after Job said he wished he had never been born.

Their tradition was that God is just, rewarding the righteous and punishing the sinful, but Job claimed to be righteous and was clearly being punished. The friends could not accept this upset of their world view, and so chided Job that he must be in the wrong (even though they could not legitimately say how).

Think about our political situation today. Some people are so wrapped up in what the fearmongering media has told them, they cannot accept the truth for what it is anymore. Instead they argue that non-facts must be true in order to find stability in their world view. They cannot respond rationally to claims of unfairness that threaten their self-identity.



*picture from MMMS collection*

What drives your self-identity? Are you focused on God's will, or has something displaced it - like wealth did for that rich man in the Gospel reading today? If someone challenged what you hold important, how would you respond? How would you refute what they say?

Could you show them real compassion for their situation? How would you encourage both your and their lives and livelihoods?

Job lost his livelihood, his children, his place in the community, and was estranged from his wife. Now his so-called friends were telling him it was his fault; no one respected or sympathized with him. Who was encouraging his life and livelihood in this?

Most of us have never faced such severe loss and ostracizing (and I hope we never do). However, many of us are facing fears about the changing world, an upset of how the world has worked during our lives.

It is easy to get panicky, angry, and depressed when we believe our lives are being shattered by things outside of our control. It is easy to lash out, comforting to do completely self-centered things.

And when others act that way toward us, most of us have a gut reaction to respond back at them in a similar manner. It is hard to step back and ask, “How can we break the cycle of hurt & pain, and encourage the life and livelihood of all involved here?”



*picture from*

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/walking-with-jesus/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-graphics>

It may seem impossible, harder than shoving a camel through the eye of a needle. But we are blessed to know that “the word of God is living and active” and that “for God all things are possible.” So give whatever is weighing on your heart to Jesus – all the fear, rage, and pain – for the Lord to bear.

Let the Holy Spirit enable you to breathe again. Pray for renewed, healthy relationships with God and with one another. Ask for guidance on where you can show the love of God rather than the angst of society.

Look for two things this week that you can change to enable the nurturing of others and self, that encouragement of life and livelihood. Maybe it will require giving more of what you have – or more of yourself – than you expect. Perhaps it involves swallowing camel-like pride and stubbornness, converting those impulses to a thread of mending that God uses on the fabric of our lives.

Whatever the case, know that God loves you, Jesus understands your situation, and the Holy Spirit is with us to help us with our camels and needles as we are called to be servants of God’s kingdom.