

## A life of abundance rather than affluence

### *Mark 10:17-31*

The reading we had from Mark's gospel today contains one of the more well known passages of scripture – that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich person to get into heaven. It is a saying that is very effective in its message for it causes us to conjure up a rather humorous and non-sensical image, which sticks in our minds.

I could spend a lot of time this morning on examining the different theories put forward for what Jesus really meant or what he was referring to when he used this rather bizarre image, but I think that while it serves to grab our attention, the actual image is not the main point of the story.

We have a wealthy young man who seeks Jesus out with a yearning in his heart. *'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'* he asks.

This is a man who desires something more, something beyond what we see around us, something deeper and more lasting. And I think most of us can relate to that yearning. We may not phrase it in exactly the same way as this man did, but the essence of the desire is there for many of us in, what can often be, a very unsatisfying western lifestyle. How many of us have thought *'There must be more to life than this'* or felt that there is something missing in our lives but can't quite put our finger on what it is?

Jesus responds to this man's question by reminding him of some of the commandments given by God to his people: *'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, defraud or bear false witness against another, you shall honour your parents.'*

Now at first glance this may appear to be a set of rules to measure up to, but when we spend some time reflecting on them we realize that all of these commandments are about living a life of love. They are about respecting and honouring each other, taking responsibility for ourselves and each other, cherishing the sanctity of our relationships. Jesus is saying: *'If you really want to live a full and abundant life, live a life of love.'*

Our young friend, unfortunately, misinterprets Jesus' answer, he doesn't quite understand the depth of what Jesus is calling him to. He dutifully replies *'I have done all these things since my youth'*, almost as if he has ticked them off on a checklist.

I am not judging him for this nor do I doubt his sincerity.

You will notice Jesus cares deeply for this young man and his efforts to live a life worthy of his calling. But despite his best efforts, this man seems to have missed the real point. Abundant and eternal life is not about ticking items off a checklist, but living with an attitude of humility and love.

Jesus lovingly decides to go to the heart of the matter with this young man – who could easily have been you or me. Jesus challenges the man to let go of his material possessions, everything that gave him his sense of security and identity.

*‘Sell what you own and give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven, then come, follow me.’*

This seems like such a tough ask doesn't it? Give everything away?

But Jesus is trying to teach this man something about himself and what it is to truly live a life of love. Love should not be treated as a commodity that we choose to give or to withhold according to who does and doesn't deserve it, or to according to how we happen to be feeling at the time. Love is self-emptying, it is a true gift that comes with no strings attached, it is a response of reverence for the other, and, it is costly.

If we are more concerned about our own security, our own comfort, our own standing in the community than we are about the needs of others, then we are not living a life of love. That is what Jesus is trying to show this very sincere and well meaning young man. He is inviting this man, and us, to take the risk of living with an open hand rather than a closed fist.

In the end our identity, our sense of security, our sense of self worth come from a rich relationship with God and with each other, not from our material possessions. In our hearts of hearts, I believe we know this, but the temptation to be distracted by money and owning stuff, is so strong particularly in our affluent culture. We really struggle to live in a counter cultural way, to model a different, more fulfilling way of life, and let's be honest, a lot of the time we fail.

If Jesus were to meet with you today and suggest that, in order to truly live, you must radically change your lifestyle, what would your response be? Honestly? Thankfully, with Jesus, failing is not the end of the story, there is always the promise of forgiveness and the strength for a new start. This is what the Christian life of faith is all about.

Jesus continued to love that man in spite of his inability to make a life-giving choice at that time.

This does not mean that we are excused for our poor choices or our self-centredness – I am sure Jesus too was greatly saddened by this man's lack of trust and courage, but his love for him, and for us, is not diminished.

We see this most clearly in the Easter mystery where Jesus chooses to live out both the profound cost and the life-giving blessing of real love.

In our baptism we enter into the Easter mystery in such a way that our story becomes God's story and God's story becomes our story. By offering ourselves to God in such a way, we choose to live a life of love through the grace of God and in his strength alone.

Every day is an opportunity to renew our baptismal vows, to daily take up our cross and follow Christ in the way of love and holiness.

We all need encouragement, nurture and the grace of God as we travel the road of faith and love. What we celebrate today, and every time we gather to worship, is that we travel that road together as a community of Christ.

May God bless each and every one of us as we seek to live a full and abundant life in the love and light of Christ.

The Lord be with you.