

The Rich Young Ruler

The sermon given at the Parish Communion Service on 14 October 2018 by the Associate Vicar, the Revd. Wendy Wales, in Beverley Minster.

Amos 5; 6-7, 10-15; Mark 10:17-31

I hope you have your thinking caps on this morning as I have 3 important questions for us to consider together- and they aren't easy ones!

What does eternal life mean?

Who is rich?

Will your camel pass the agility test?

I wonder if you are someone who looks forward or who gazes back over their shoulder?

I would imagine that if you are my age or older, you will, probably at regular intervals, make statements about how much better it was in the past....

I remember when you could fill your car with petrol and have change from £5

Back in the day, the church used to have people queuing down the street to get in

I remember when children could play out safely on the streets

When I was a lad, everyone respected their elders and betters

I remember when Hull had a thriving fishing industry

Some of you will be adding your own to the list in your heads....

I've spent 4 years working with young people, and they all believe the hope lies in the future....

If only we have a change of government/ leader/president- everything will be better

If only we leave/remain/ have another vote/ don't have another vote...the country's problems will be solved.

When Jeremy/ Jacob/ Julie becomes prime minister/leader/president all our problems will be solved

If only the church got more drums/ lights/events/youth workers/prayer books/ modern services/ traditional services/ was more inclusive/ was more radical and hard line ...people will start coming again

Remembering and dreaming is nothing new- the Bible is full of stories of the people of God grumbling because they are far from the good old days and dreaming of a better future. The Jewish people who were listening to Jesus speak were no exception. They knew they lived in the 'current age' which they believed to be wicked, corrupt and full of people who were spoiling things.

They were longingly waiting for the 'Age to Come' to arrive- a very tangible event that they believed would be the start of a new era of justice, peace and freedom- eternal life.

Convinced it's arrival was imminent, the question asked by our young man is a pretty important one.....how do I make sure I won't get left out? Can I guarantee my name will be on the priority list? Will I get the good stuff forever?

Then, as now, many people believed that following a particular set of rules, giving enough money- especially to the temple, synagogue or church or belonging to the right family line would see them right....the young man got excited when Jesus gave him a list of commandments to keep....yes, yes, I've done that- this is going well.

Then, the bomb shell....Jesus turning everything upside down again....sell everything you have and give it to the poor. Jesus kingdom was radically different to the prevalent way of thinking- instead of making sure we are healthy, wealthy and future proof....he suggests we should be giving it all away to those who have less than us.

This brings us to my next question: Who is rich?

I wonder how many of you immediately answered in your head....NOT ME!!

Jeff Bezos is rich....worth 112 billion dollars he is the richest person in the world this year.

Rich people are footballers, bankers, the royal family ...that person who arrives at church in a brand new BMW...definitely not me, unless I win the lottery, I could barely pay the rent last month...if you could see my mortgage/overdraft...my pocket money is never going to put me on the richest kid list....

But here's the twist: by virtue of living in the UK- we are very likely to be rich in global terms. We have free emergency medical care, safe running water, relatively cheap sources of food. Almost half the world, over 3 billion people live on less than 2 and a half dollars a day and at least 80% of people live on less than \$10 a day.

And here's the double twist....I don't think Jesus was just talking about money or material wealth-Many of us are rich in relationships- loved by children, grandchildren or great grandchildren. Some here are rich in time. Others are intellectually rich- owning several degrees or an impressive CV. I know lots of you are culturally rich- travelling the country and world, visiting the theatres and cinemas. I'm sure some are physically rich- sporty, healthy, eating well.

So....eternal life is about working for God's Kingdom- seeking justice, peace and wholeness for the whole world- sharing the love of Jesus, being prepared to give away everything that we have.

We all have richness in our lives....so we are going to struggle with this radical way of living- we will all be tempted to hide in memories of the past or in dreams of the future....

Which leads me to my final question- is your camel agile enough?

It is easier for a camel to get through the eye of the needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Tom and I went on a roof tour yesterday- it was fantastic and if you haven' t been up...then I thoroughly recommend it....but if you are tall, as my husband Tom is... then you will need to be fairly agile as you'll be doing a lot of ducking and squeezing through small spaces and under narrow doorways. Several of us left our belongings at the bottom of the steep staircase up.

You probably know that Jerusalem is a walled city which you had to enter through one of the gates. If you were a trader, arriving with your camel, laden with goods....you'd have a problem getting through the gate that was called The Eye of the Needle as it was very small- a bit like the entrance to the Minster Roof.

You'd need to unload your camel so it wasn't too wide...it would need to go through on it's knees, you'd have to bring the cargo through separately- it would be complicated, messy and you might need some help...it would have to be an agile camel, or it would be stuck on the outside of the city.

A rich man COULD get his camel through the eye of the needle....but it was a process.

As you consider if your camel is agile enough, ask yourself...what is weighing your camel down this morning? What is stopping you from enjoying being part of Jesus' kingdom, how can you seek the Lord and live?

I suggest you allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you in a moment of quiet this week about anything that might be weighing you down- it could be fears of health, money worries, a career that is leaving you no time or headspace for the people you care about, a loneliness or bitterness that threatens to overwhelm...it could be the sense that God is calling you to step into something new- to share your faith with a neighbour, to start a project for a group of people in need, to leave an abusive relationship....

If something does leap into your mind- we have a trained group of people who would love to pray with you during communion. Don't worry if you've never been prayed for before- it's a gentle, confidential and powerful experience. We believe that God is alive, He loves us and wants to bless us- the prayer ministry team will sit with you as you seek God together to lighten the load from your camel!

Amos 5; 6-7, 10-15

Seek the Lord and live,

or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire,
and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it.

7 Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood,
and bring righteousness to the ground!

They hate the one who reproves in the gate,
and they abhor the one who speaks the truth.

11 Therefore because you trample on the poor
and take from them levies of grain,
you have built houses of hewn stone,
but you shall not live in them;
you have planted pleasant vineyards,
but you shall not drink their wine.

12 For I know how many are your transgressions,
and how great are your sins—
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,
and push aside the needy in the gate.

13 Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time;
for it is an evil time.

14 Seek good and not evil,
that you may live;
and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you,
just as you have said.

15 Hate evil and love good,
and establish justice in the gate;
it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts,
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Mark 10:17-31

The Rich Man

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[a] 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[b]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,[c] “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 news,[d] 30 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.”