

Think Differently ...

... to enter into the Kingdom of God

A sermon given on the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity, 13th October 2024, by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster.

Mark 10:17-31

Do you remember Rubik's Cube? Of course you do. We all remember Rubik's Cube. But I wonder, do you remember the follow-up? Rubik's Clock? It's a puzzle with nine clock faces, each of them with a single hand. It's very interesting. There are various knobs and buttons that change the combination of hands that move and the idea is to try and get all the hands pointing up to the 12. That's the easy bit. What's tricky is that on the other side of the clock, there are another nine faces with nine hands, and the same combination of buttons and knobs moves different hands on each side of the face. So trying to coordinate the two sides is very difficult. If you're not careful by focusing on only one side of the puzzle and trying to get that right, you just make a bigger mess of the other side - and I think that's quite a good picture of life: it's more complicated than we think because different facets of our lives which we thought we could compartmentalise and keep separate, turn out to be deeply connected. To give a silly example, I love desserts. I love treacle sponge and apple pie and chocolatey things. But I also love the idea of a flat stomach. It was a matter of deep pain and disappointment when at around the age of 40, I discovered that these two things were connected, and that I couldn't indulge my love of sticky chocolatey things without losing my nice flat tummy, or that I couldn't get a rippling six-pack without exercising restraint and saying no to the puddings (- so it's no secret as to which of those conflicting drives gave way) and it's a bit like Rubik's clock - you can't solve one side of the puzzle without messing up the other.

Something like that is going on in this morning's gospel reading. This man who loves money, who relies on it to feel secure, who relies on it to feel he has more choices, and who relies on it to feel like he matters and is important, also wants to inherit eternal life. In other words, he wants to feel fully alive, to be the person he knows God wants him to be. But he hasn't realised that those two instincts are connected. You can rely on money to solve all your problems, but that's not in the end going to provide that sense of well-being and deep contentment that will really satisfy you. Or you can discover the gift of God's generosity and God's love and the well-being that goes with that, but not without letting go of some of your material baggage. You can't have both. And in the gospel Jesus confronts this man with a choice: you can use your wealth to feel independent and self-sufficient, but if you do, you will never experience the deeper reality of God's peace and joy; you're like a camel trying to get through the eye of a needle; you will only have completed one side of Rubik's clock.

So what to do? Well, Jesus rather radically tells him to give it all away: kill the fantasy; get rid of the illusion that money will give you all the answers; if you're addicted to drink, you have to resolve never to touch another drop - go one day at a time; and if you're addicted to money, you have to give it all away. But you can only do it with the help of a higher power. So Jesus says, "*Come, follow me.*" - open your life to Jesus; make yourself fully present to him; make his priorities your own and you will discover the Kingdom of God. But I wonder how you respond to those words of Jesus to this man - "*Go sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have*

treasure in heaven." If you're anything like me those words probably make you feel quite uncomfortable.

Can you actually think of anybody who has really done that, given away everything they had in order to follow Jesus. St. Francis maybe; Mother Teresa maybe. If you know anyone who's joined a religious order, they will have given up their possessions in order to follow Jesus. But I don't imagine you're likely to have a long list of people who have literally done this. Even if it was more common, would it really solve the problem of poverty? If Elon Musk gave away his billions would poverty be eradicated? Of course not. But the example of the monks might give us a clue, might be worth dwelling on - by renouncing personal possessions, monks and nuns both do and do not become poor. A few years ago, the monks of Worth Abbey carried out a valuation of the Monastery's estates, and they realised that if they sold up all the Monastery's hundreds of acres of prime Sussex real estate, they would all of them be millionaires many times over. And so there was this paradox that personally they were poor, but as a community they were rich. So maybe there is more than one way of being rich or poor. You can give your wealth away, which might add in the end to the problem of poverty by making yourself destitute, or you can share it. You can hold it in common. A year or so ago, I heard of a church that was addressing the cost of living crisis by getting folk to pool resources for a shared roast Sunday lunch. What they couldn't afford individually they could afford together. Here at the Minster we do something a little bit similar with Hope into Action. Instead of giving money away, folk with savings in deposit and building society accounts are sharing it by clubbing together to buy a house for people at risk of homelessness. So they're not giving the money away. They're investing it for the benefit of those who can't afford a home. But that does require a letting go, a renouncing of exclusive possession.

The rich man who came to Jesus realised that deep down his wealth wasn't enough - otherwise, he wouldn't have come and asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life. He knew that although his life looked sorted out and comfortable, the other side of the puzzle was still a mess. The answer was to step back and try and look at both sides of the puzzle and to recognise the bigger picture.

That means thinking differently, letting go of the urge to put oneself first, letting go of home and family and money as our main sources of security, and learning how to share them, entering to the hospitality of the Kingdom of God and inviting others to come, too. Then maybe things might start falling into place on both sides of the puzzle.

Reading Text

Mark 10.17-31

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; Honour 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 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 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, '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, 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.'