

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro

The past few Sundays, we have heard Jesus teaching his Disciples about the radical demands of the Kingdom of God.

First, we heard that rather than worrying about who is the Greatest—we instead need to focus on being “Last of All and Servant of All.”

Then we heard that we must receive the Kingdom of God like a child, or more appropriately to last week, like our pets.

We need to come to God's Kingdom FREE and without condition, we are to come full of ENERGY and LOVE.

And now, we once again hear of the radical demands of the Kingdom of God as a Rich Young Ruler asks Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

I. Rich Young Ruler

A. As the scene opens, Jesus is setting out on a journey, when a man ran up and knelt before him.

1. He is obviously a man of passion.

2 He wants to inherit eternal life, to live with God forever.

3. We can almost imagine him running up and throwing himself at Jesus' feet, eager to know what Jesus has to say.

B. Jesus responds by telling him to follow the commandments and to live a good life.

1. But the man says he has done this since he was a child.

2. Truly, Jesus can see that the man wants to **go deeper** in his relationship with God—for, as the Gospel says, Jesus looked at him and loved him—he knew this fellow was earnest in his desire.

3. So, Jesus took him to the next level, telling him to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor and thus receive “treasure in heaven” and to follow him.

C. But the man couldn't do it.

1. He couldn't give up his attachment to his “**THINGS.**”

2. He turns his back on the very thing he seeks, because he can't let go of the one thing that is a barrier to true happiness and following God;
- **for his possessions had come to possess him.**

3. And in grieving the loss of his possessions, the young man loses sight of something much more important.

4. Jesus invited the young man to “come and follow me”—inviting him to a new way of life—the very life he says he wants to live.

5. But in the end he turns his back on it all—Jesus asks him for a total giving of himself to God, and that is something the man is unable to accept.

6. Instead of relying on God and God's way, he clutches even tighter to his things and relying on them.

7. And so, he walked away **grieving**, for he had many possessions.

8. This is the only place in the Gospels when someone rejects the personal call of Jesus to “Follow me”;

- how great must the love of his possessions have been?

II. Barriers to God

A. Jesus knew what the BARRIER was for that young man—what was keeping him from going deeper in his relationship with God.

1. And when he challenged him to give it up—he couldn't.

2. What are the BARRIERS to OUR relationship with God?

3. What is the BLOCK in your life—what keeps YOU from a closer relationship with God?

4. For many people, like the Rich Young Man, it is the **status** and **wealth** we have accumulated over the years.

5. We begin to think, “I’ve done pretty well for myself. I know what I’m doing. I don’t need to rely on anything else but me and my nest egg.”

6. So, we believe that we know **what’s best** to do with our Time and our Talent and our Treasure—we begin to think we know better than God.

7. And so we keep it—and focus on ourselves, and OUR wellbeing, and OUR enjoyment—and keep it for OUR OWN use.

8. And gradually, without knowing it—we begin to build up a BARRIER between us and God.

9. And before we know it, that BARRIER becomes so large that we just walk away—walk away from God.

B. Jesus, in a bit of hyperbole, says, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God.

1. If we try to do it on our own—if we put all our reliance on ourselves and our things—it will be impossible.

2. There has to be another way.

3. As Jesus says, “*For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.*”

4. And that’s the key, isn’t it—if we try to do things on our own, relying on ourselves, we are doomed to failure;

- but if we open up to God, and rely on God and God’s way, things become much easier.

III. Stewardship and the Demands of the Kingdom

A. So, what kind of an impact do these demands of the Kingdom of God have on our lives?

1. How has Jesus’ call to a life of service, where the first are last and the last are first, impacted the way you live your life?

2. And what of Jesus’ call to come to the Kingdom of God with the innocence of a child—open and loving to all—and ready to offer God’s **extravagant** and **inclusive abundant love** to all, without condition?

3. And now, we are called to examine the **BARRIERS** that keep US from following God’s way.

4. How are you called to break down those **BARRIERS**?
- What is Jesus offering to you, to enable you to rely on God and to go deeper in your relationship with God?

5. How can you use your **GIFTS**, and your **MONEY** to further God’s kingdom here and now—while **relying on God** to see you through?

6. Those are questions that we will need to be asking ourselves over the next few weeks as we begin to focus on our annual pledge campaign.

7. And key among those questions is: What gifts that have been given to me do I need to use in God’s service?

B. The story is told that **W.C. Fields** was in failing health and near the end of his notoriously irreverent and indulgent life.

1. He was visited by a friend who found him propped up in bed, reading the Bible.

2. His friend was rather surprised and asked, “What are you doing with a Bible?”

3. And W.C. Fields replied with honest wit, “Well, my boy, I’m looking for loopholes.”

4. Looking for loopholes—is that the way we look at our giving; is that how we approach the service of God?

5. Do we fall into the same pitfalls as the Rich Young Ruler when it comes to the giving of our possessions to God and God’s service?

C. How will we respond to the call to return to God a portion of all that God gives to us to be used in God’s work and ministry here at St. Columba’s?

1. In the coming weeks, spend some quiet time with God, and try to be open to God’s direction in your decision.

2. Be aware of those barriers that keep you from trusting in God’s love and care, and try to move them aside just a little bit more—to open a wider pathway between you and God.

3. Read the Stewardship messages in the bulletin—take them home and ponder them for a moment or two during the week.

4. Join us for our STEWARDSHIP DINNER—October 26th—as we have an opportunity to hear from Bishop Diane and the Stewardship Committee—and receive your Pledge Packet.

5. And then join us on Thanksgiving Sunday, November 21st, as we offer our pledges and give thanks for all that God has given us in our lives.

6. Think about your gift to St. Columba's as a FRESH START and an opportunity to go deeper in your relationship with God.

Let Us Pray

God of the narrow way, you call us to shed all that burdens the lightness of life: help us to surrender false wealth, embrace our need of you, and live for your kingdom above all things; through Jesus Christ, the richness of God.

Amen.

(Shakespeare p.73)