

# Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, Gospel Year B

## THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE

Mark 10:17-31

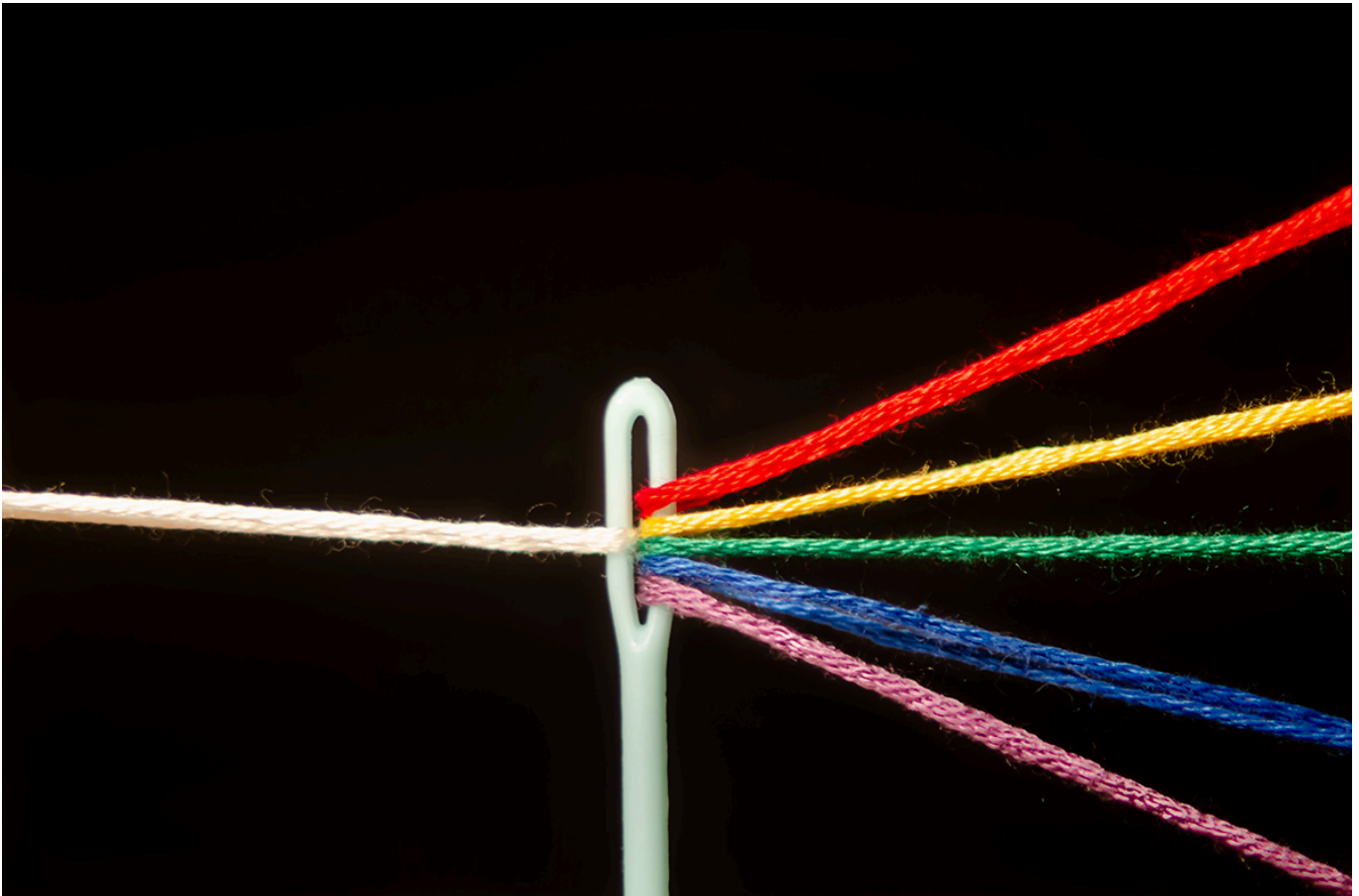
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Steven E. Albertin

*17As 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?" 18Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19You 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.' " 20He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." 21Jesus, 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." 22When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.*

*23Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" 24And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25It 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." 26They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" 27Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."*

*28Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." 29Jesus 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, 30who 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. 31But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."*



*We can't give up our stuff, but he gave up everything, even his desire to remain in control, and simply trusted God saying, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."*

## **DIAGNOSIS: Stuck in the Eye**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Tough Words**

*"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than*

*it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*

This passage is not going to be on the average Christian's list of his ten favorite Bible passages. We do not like to talk about money, especially in church. More than anything else in life, how we use our money reflects our deepest values and commitments. Look at how we spend our money, and you will see our religion.

No wonder Jesus talks so much about money. There is no more "religious" subject in life. We don't need to talk about God and heaven and hell in order to talk about religion. "Show me the money" and I will show a man's religion.

Here we meet a man who has the money. He is not only rich, he's a guy who's got it all together. He is young and handsome, drives a fancy car . . . and goes to church every Sunday.

### ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Anxious***

But there is no joy in Mudville! He is anxious. He knows deep down that riches still leave him wanting. His question to Jesus betrays his worry, "Good Teacher, what MUST I DO to inherit eternal life?"

He seems to be doing the right thing. He recognizes that money is not everything. He has come to the right place. It is hard to knock someone who's interested in Jesus.

That is why Jesus' reaction seems so strange. Jesus seems to put the guy down. Maybe Jesus is put off by the guy's brazen attempt to flatter him.

But the guy has got a far bigger problem. When he asks, "What MUST I DO to inherit eternal life?" he thinks he can do whatever it takes to impress Jesus.

He has good reason for his confidence. He is rich. He is pious. He is good at keeping the commandments. Jesus does not even call him on the carpet for fudging. This guy is good.

But something is still not right. Jesus knows it and this man knows it too. That is why he still nervously asks, "What MUST I DO?" Whatever his heart is clinging to, it is not making him happy. Jesus knows what must be done.

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Shocked***

*"You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."*

Jesus touches a nerve. He punctures the balloon. The man can't let go. He can't trust Jesus more than his money: "When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions."

Jesus turns to his disciples . . . and all of us who have been watching: "It is harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

The issue is not how much money is too much. It's not about who is rich and who is not. The issue is this: We are all rich. The problem is not just that we keep clinging to our stuff. We keep clinging to our stuff because we keep wanting to remain in control.

"Jesus, just tell us what to do!"

Jesus tells him what to do and he can't do it. The disciples couldn't do it. We can't do it. Letting go of control is impossible. Jesus is asking too much. No camel is ever going to slip through the eye of a needle. Neither will we, as long as we keep on insisting that "we gotta drive the bus." It is too scary

to let go of the steering wheel and let God. In order to go through the needle, we must give up everything. We must die. We are shocked! How could God make this impossible demand of us?

## **PROGNOSIS: Pulled through the Needle**



### ***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Surprised***

But . . . what is impossible for the rich man, for the astonished disciples, and for us . . . is possible for God! That is the whole point of Jesus' conversation.

We may walk away from Jesus because we can't do let go. However, Jesus does not walk away from us. Bound and determined to pull us through the eye of the needle, he walks to Jerusalem, suffering death for us. On that Friday afternoon, it sure looked like he got stuck in the eye of the needle . . . just like all of us. However, he died doing what we can never do. We can't

give up our stuff, but he gave up everything, even his desire to remain in control, and simply trusted God saying, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

His faith was not in vain. He did not stay stuck. He was raised from the dead. He passed through the eye of the needle. What was impossible for us was not only possible but accomplished by Jesus. He did what only God can do: pull us . . . along with all the other camels in the world through the eye of a needle, through death, scarcity, shortage, greed, and despair . . . into the Kingdom of God.

***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Someone to Trust***

In Jesus Christ, at last, we meet someone and something we can trust. We can let go of our fears, anxieties, embarrassments, and shames because we have received a love that will never end. At his table, there is no rationing. At the font, there is no statute of limitations. There is no needle-eye too tiny for God to pull us through.

***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Giving It Away***

When we pass through the eye of the needle, life changes. It can no longer be business as usual. We begin to find ourselves doing strange and marvelous things. Not only do camels pass through the eyes of needles, but in a world where money means everything, we start living as if money means nothing. In a world that insists, "Show me the money," we give it away.

We don't hide money but make it a central part of our public worship. We insist on calling it an OFFERING and acting as if it is a privilege. Here it is a GET TO and not a GOTTA. No one needs to twist our arms or bribe our greed.

Here the impossible is possible . . . and camels pass through

the eyes of needles.